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The Other
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LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

The Other House

By
Henry James

In Two Volumes

Vol. ii

London
William Heinemann
1896

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XIX

TONY went toward his messenger, who, as she saw Rose apparently leaving the garden, pressing out : " Would *you*, Miss Armiger, very kindly go over for Effie ? She wasn't even yet ready," she explained as she came back up the slope with her friend, " and I was afraid to wait after promising Paul to meet him."

" He's not here, you see," said Tony ; " it's he who, most ungallantly, makes you wait. Never mind ; you'll wait with me." He looked at Rose as they overtook her. " Will you go and bring the child, as our friend here asks, or is such an act as that also, and still more, inconsistent with your mysterious principles ?"

" You must kindly excuse me," Rose said directly to Jean. " I've a letter to write in the house. Now or never—I must catch the post."

" Don't let us keep you, then," Tony returned,

"I'll go over myself—as soon as Paul comes back."

"I'll send him straight out." And Rose Armiger retired in good order.

Tony followed her with his eyes; then he exclaimed: "It's, upon my soul, as if she couldn't trust herself——!" His remark, which he checked, dropped into a snap of his fingers while Jean Martle wondered.

"To do what?" she asked.

Tony hesitated. "To do nothing! The child's all right?"

"Perfectly right. It's only that the great Gorham has decreed that she's to have her usual little supper before she comes, and that, with her ribbons and frills all covered with an enormous bib, Effie had just settled down to that extremely solemn function."

Tony in his turn wondered. "Why shouldn't she have her supper here?"

"Ah, you must ask the great Gorham!"

"And didn't *you* ask her?"

"I did better—I divined her," said Jean. "She doesn't trust our kitchen."

Tony laughed. "Does she apprehend poison?"

"She apprehends what she calls 'sugar and spice.'"

" 'And all that's nice?' Well, there's too much that's nice here, certainly! Leave the poor child then, like the little princess you all make of her, to her cook and her 'taster,' to the full rigour of her royalty, and stroll with me here till Paul comes out to you." He looked at his watch and about at the broad garden where the shadows of the trees were still and the long afternoon had grown rich. "This is remarkably peaceful, and there's plenty of time." Jean concurred with a murmur as soft as the stir of the breeze, a "Plenty, plenty," as serene as if, to oblige Tony Bream, so charming a day would be sure to pause in its passage. They went a few steps, but he stopped again with a question. "Do you know what Paul wants of you?"

Jean looked a moment at the grass by her feet. "I think I do." Then raising her eyes without shyness, but with unqualified gravity, "Do *you* know, Mr. Bream?" she asked.

"Yes—I've just now heard."

"From Miss Armiger?"

"From Miss Armiger. She appears to have had it from Paul himself."

The girl gave out her mild surprise. "Why has he told her?"

Tony hesitated. "Because she's such a good person to tell things to."

"Is it her immediately telling them again that makes her so?" Jean inquired with a faint smile.

Faint as this smile was, Tony met it as if he had been struck by it, and as if indeed, in the midst of an acquaintance which four years had now consecrated, he had not quite got used to being struck. That acquaintance had practically begun, on an unforgettable day, with his opening his eyes to it from an effort which had been already then the effort to forget—his suddenly taking her in as he lay on the sofa in his hall. From the way he sometimes looked at her it might have been judged that he had even now not taken her in completely—that the act of slow, charmed apprehension had yet to melt into accepted knowledge. It had in truth been made continuous by the continuous expansion of its object. If the sense of lying there on the sofa still sometimes came back to Tony, it was because he was interested

in not interrupting by a rash motion the process taking place in the figure before him, the capricious rotation by which the woman peeped out of the child and the child peeped out of the woman. There was no point at which it had begun and none at which it would end, and it was a thing to gaze at with an attention refreshingly baffled. The frightened child had become a tall, slim nymph on a cloud, and yet there had been no moment of anything so gross as catching her in the act of change. If there had been he would have met it with some punctual change of his own ; whereas it was his luxurious idea—unobserved till now—that in the midst of the difference so delightfully ambiguous he was free just *not* to change, free to remain as he was and go on liking her on trivial grounds. It had seemed to him that there was no one he had ever liked whom he could like quite so comfortably : a man of his age had had what he rather loosely called the “ usual ” flashes of fondness. There had been no worrying question of the light this particular flash might kindle ; he had never had to ask himself what his appreciation of Jean Martle might lead to. It would lead to exactly nothing—that had been settled all round in advance.

This was a happy, lively provision that kept everything down, made sociability a cool, public, out-of-door affair, without a secret or a mystery—confined it, as one might say, to the breezy, sunny forecourt of the temple of friendship, forbidding it any dream of access to the obscure and comparatively stuffy interior. Tony had acutely remarked to himself that a thing could be led to only when there was a practicable road. As present to him to-day as on that other day was the little hour of violence—so strange and sad and sweet—which in his life had effectually suppressed any thoroughfare, making this expanse so pathless that, had he not been looking for a philosophic rather than a satiric term, he might almost have compared it to a desert. He answered his companion's inquiry about Rose's responsibility as an informant after he had satisfied himself that if she smiled exactly as she did it was only another illustration of a perfect instinct. That instinct, which at any time turned all talk with her away from flatness, told her that the right attitude for her now was the middle course between anxiety and resignation. "If Miss Armiger hadn't spoken," he said, "I

shouldn't have known. And of course I'm interested in knowing."

"But why is she interested in your doing so?" Jean asked.

Tony walked on again. "She has several reasons. One of them is that she greatly likes Paul and that, greatly liking him, she wishes the highest happiness conceivable for him. It occurred to her that as I greatly like a certain young lady I might not unnaturally desire for that young lady a corresponding chance, and that with a hint," laughed Tony, "that she really is about to have it, I might perhaps see my way to putting in a word for the dear boy in advance."

The girl strolled beside him, looking quietly before her. "How does she know," she demanded, "whom you 'greatly like'?"

The question pulled him up a little, but he resisted the impulse, constantly strong in him, to stop again and stand face to face with her. He continued to laugh and after an instant he replied: "Why, I suppose I must have told her."

"And how many persons will she have told?"

"I don't care how many," Tony said, "and I

don't think you need care either. Every one but she—from lots of observation—knows we're good friends, and it's because that's such a pleasant old story with us all that I feel as if I might frankly say to you what I have on my mind."

"About what Paul may have to say?"

"The first moment you let him."

Tony was going on when she broke in: "How long have you had it on your mind?"

He found himself, at her challenge, just a trifle embarrassed. "How long?"

"As it's only since Miss Armiger has told you that you've known there's anything in the air."

This inquiry gave Tony such pause that he met it first with a laugh and then with a counter-appeal. "You make me feel dreadfully dense! Do you mind my asking how long you yourself have known that what may be in the air is on the point of alighting?"

"Why, since Paul spoke to me."

"Just now—before you went to Bounds?" Tony wondered. "You were immediately sure that that's what he wants?"

"What else can he want? He doesn't want so

much," Jean added, "that there would have been many alternatives."

"I don't know what you call 'much'!" Again Tony wondered. "And it produces no more effect upon you——"

"Than I'm showing to you now?" the girl asked. "Do you think me dreadfully stolid?"

"No, because I know that, in general, what you show isn't at all the full measure of what you feel. You're a great little mystery. Still," Tony blandly continued, "you strike me as calm—as quite sublime—for a young lady whose fate's about to be sealed. Unless, of course, you've regarded it," he added, "as sealed from far away back."

They had strolled, in the direction they had followed, as far as they could go, and they necessarily stopped for a turn. Without taking up his last words Jean stood there and looked obscurely happy, as it seemed to him, at his recognition of her having appeared as quiet as she wished. "You haven't answered my question," she simply said. "You haven't told me how long you've had it on your mind that you must say to me whatever it is you wish to say."

"Why is it important I should answer it?"

"Only because you seemed positively to imply that the time of your carrying your idea about had been of the shortest. In the case of advice, if to advise is what you wish——"

"It *is* what I wish," Tony interrupted; "strangely as it may strike you that, in regard to such a matter as we refer to, one should be eager for such a responsibility. The question of time doesn't signify—what signifies is one's sincerity. I had an impression, I confess, that the prospect I a good while ago supposed you have accepted had—what shall I call it?—rather faded away. But at the same time I hoped"—and Tony invited his companion to resume their walk—"that it would charmingly come up again."

Jean moved beside him and spoke with a colourless kindness which suggested no desire to challenge or cross-question, but a thoughtful interest in anything, in the connection in which they were talking, that he would be so good as to tell her and an earnest desire to be clear about it. Perhaps there was also in her manner just the visible tinge of a confidence that he would tell her the absolute truth.

"I see. You hoped it would charmingly come up again."

"So that on learning that it *is* charmingly coming up, don't you see?" Tony laughed, "I'm so agreeably agitated that I spill over on the spot. I want, without delay, to be definite to you about the really immense opinion I have of dear Paul. It can't do any harm, and it may do a little good, to mention that it has always seemed to me that we've only got to give him time. I mean, of course, don't you know," he added, "for him quite to distinguish himself."

Jean was silent a little, as if she were thoroughly taking this home. "Distinguish himself in what way?" she asked with all her tranquillity.

"Well—in every way," Tony handsomely replied. "He's full of stuff—there's a great deal of him: too much to come out all at once. Of course you know him—you've known him half your life; but I see him in a strong and special light, a light in which he has scarcely been shown to you and which puts him to a real test. He has ability; he has ideas; he has absolute honesty; and he has more-over a good stiff back of his own. He's a fellow of

head ; he's a fellow of heart. In short he's a man of gold."

"He's a man of gold," Jean repeated with punctual acceptance, yet as if it mattered much more that Tony should think so than that she should. "It would be odd," she went on, "to be talking with you on a subject so personal to myself if it were not that I've felt Paul's attitude for so long past to be rather publicly taken for granted. He has felt it so, too, I think, poor boy, and for good or for ill there has been in our situation very little mystery and perhaps not much modesty."

"Why *should* there be, of the false kind, when even the true has nothing to do with the matter ? You and Paul are great people : he's the heir-apparent and you're the most eligible princess in the Almanach de Gotha. You can't be there and be hiding behind the window-curtain : you must step out on the balcony to be seen of the populace. Your most private affairs are affairs of state. At the smallest hint like the one I just mentioned even an old dunderhead like me catches on—he sees the strong reasons for Paul's attitude. However, it's

not of that so much that I wanted to say a word. I thought perhaps you'd just let me touch on your own." Tony hesitated ; he felt vaguely disconcerted by the special quality of stillness that, though she moved beside him, her attention, her expectation put forth. It came over him that for the purpose of his plea she was almost too prepared, and this made him speculate. He stopped short again and, uneasily, "May I light one more cigarette?" he asked. She assented with a flicker in her dim smile, and while he lighted he was increasingly conscious that she waited. He met the deep gentleness of her eyes and reflected afresh that if she was always beautiful she was beautiful at different times from different sources. What was the source of the impression she made on him at this moment if not a kind of refinement of patience, in which she seemed actually to hold her breath? "In fact," he said as he threw away his match, "I *have* touched on it—I mean on the great hope we all have that you do see your way to meeting your friend as he deserves."

"You 'all' have it?" Jean softly asked.

Tony hesitated again. "I'm sure I'm quite right

in speaking for Wilverley at large. It takes the greatest interest in Paul, and I needn't at this time of day remind you of the interest it takes in yourself. But, I repeat, what I meant more particularly to utter was my own special confidence in your decision. Now that I'm fully enlightened it comes home to me that, as regards such a possibility as your taking your place here as a near neighbour and a permanent friend"—and Tony fixedly smiled—"why, I can only feel the liveliest suspense. I want to make thoroughly sure of you!"

Jean took this in as she had taken the rest; after which she simply said: "Then I think I ought to tell you that I shall not meet Paul in the way that what you're so good as to say seems to point to."

Tony had made many speeches, both in public and in private, and he had naturally been exposed to replies of the incisive no less than of the massive order. But no check of the current had ever made him throw back his head quite so far as this brief and placid announcement. "You'll not meet him——?"

"I shall never marry him."

He undisguisedly gasped. "In spite of all the reasons——?"

"Of course I've thought the reasons over—often and often. But there are reasons on the other side too. I shall never marry him," she repeated.

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It was singular that though half an hour before he had not felt the want of the assurance he had just asked of her, yet now that he saw it definitely withheld it took an importance as instantly as a mirror takes a reflection. This importance was so great that he found himself suddenly scared by what he heard. He thought an instant with intensity. "In spite of knowing that you'll disappoint"—he paused a little—"the universal hope?"

"I know whom I shall disappoint; but I must bear that. I shall disappoint Cousin Kate."

"Horribly," said Tony.

"Horribly."

"And poor Paul—to within an inch of his life."

"No, not poor Paul, Mr. Bream; not poor Paul in the least," Jean said. She spoke without a hint of defiance or the faintest ring of bravado, as if for mere veracity and lucidity, since an opportunity quite

unsought had been forced upon her. "I know about poor Paul. It's all right about poor Paul," she declared, smiling.

She spoke and she looked at him with a sincerity so distilled, as he felt, from something deep within her that to pretend to gainsay her would be in the worst taste. He turned about, not very brilliantly, as he was aware, to some other resource. "You'll immensely disappoint your own people."

"Yes, my mother and my grandmother—they both would like it. But they've never had any promise from me."

Tony was silent awhile. "And Mrs. Beever—hasn't she had?"

"A promise? Never. I've known how much she has wanted it. But that's all."

"Ah, that's a great deal," said Tony. "If, knowing how much she has wanted it, you've come back again and again, hasn't that been tantamount to giving it?"

Jean considered. "I shall never come back again."

"Ah, my dear child, what a way to treat us!" her friend broke out.

She took no notice of this; she only went on: "Months ago—the last time I was here—an assurance, of a kind, was asked of me. But even then I held off."

"And you've gone on with that intention?"

He had grown so serious now that he cross-questioned her, but she met him with a promptitude that was touching in its indulgence. "I've gone on without an intention. I've only waited to see, to feel, to judge. The great thing seemed to me to be sure I wasn't unfair to Paul. I haven't been—I'm not unfair. He'll never say I've been—I'm sure he won't. I should have liked to be able to become his wife. But I can't."

"You've nevertheless excited hopes," said Tony. "Don't you think you ought to consider that a little more?" His uneasiness, his sense of the unexpected, as sharp as a physical pang, increased so that he began to lose sight of the importance of concealing it; and he went on even while something came into her eyes that showed he had not concealed it. "If you haven't meant not to do it, you've, so far as that goes, meant the opposite. Therefore something has made you change."

Jean hesitated. "Everything has made me change."

"Well," said Tony, with a smile so strained that he felt it almost pitiful, "we've spoken of the disappointment to others, but I suppose there's no use in my attempting to say anything of the disappointment to me. That's not the thing that, in such a case, can have much effect on you."

Again Jean hesitated: he saw how pale she had grown. "Do I understand you tell me that you really *desire* my marriage?"

If the revelation of how he desired it had not already come to him the deep mystery of her beauty at this crisis might have brought it on the spot—a spectacle in which he so lost himself for the minute that he found no words to answer till she spoke again. "Do I understand that you literally ask me for it?"

"I ask you for it—I ask you for it," said Tony Bream.

They stood looking at each other like a pair who, walking on a frozen lake, suddenly have in their ears the great crack of the ice. "And what are your reasons?"

"I'll tell you my reasons when you tell me yours for having changed."

"I've not changed," said Jean.

It was as if their eyes were indissolubly engaged. That was the way he had been looking a while before into another woman's, but he could think at this moment of the exquisite difference of Jean's. He shook his head with all the sadness and all the tenderness he felt he might permit himself to show just this once and never again. "You've changed—you've changed."

Then she gave up. "Wouldn't you much rather I should never come back?"

"Far rather. But you *will* come back," said Tony.

She looked away from him at last—turned her eyes over the place in which she had known none but emotions permitted and avowed, and again seemed to yield to the formidable truth. "So you think I had better come back—so different?"

His tenderness broke out into a smile. "As different as possible. As different as that will be just all the difference," he added.

She appeared, with her averted face, to consider

intently how much "all" might in such a case practically amount to. But "Here he comes" was what she presently replied.

Paul Beever was in sight, so freshly dressed that even at a distance his estimate of the requirements of the occasion was visible from his necktie to his boots. Adorned as it unmistakably had never been, his great featureless person moved solemnly over the lawn.

"Take him then—*take* him!" said Tony Bream.

Jean, intensely serious but with agitation held at bay, gave him one more look, a look so infinitely pacific that as, at Paul's nearer approach, he turned away from her, he had the sense of going off with a sign of her acceptance of his solution. The light in her face was the light of the compassion that had come out to him, and what was that compassion but the gage of a relief, of a promise? It made him walk down to the river with a step quickened to exhilaration; all the more that as the girl's eyes followed him he couldn't see in them the tragic intelligence he had kindled, her perception—from the very rhythm of the easy gait she had watched so often—that he really thought such a virtual

confession to her would be none too lavishly repaid by the effort for which he had appealed.

Paul Beever had in his hand his little morocco case, but his glance also rested, till it disappeared, on Tony's straight and swinging back. "I've driven him away," he said.

"It was time," Jean replied. "Effie, who wasn't ready for me, must really come at last." Then without the least pretence of unconsciousness she looked straight at the small object Paul carried.

Observing her attention to it he also dropped his eyes on it, while his hands turned it round and round in apparent uncertainty as to whether he had better present it to her open or shut. "I hope you won't be as indifferent as Effie seems to be to the pretty trifle with which I've thought I should like to commemorate your birthday." He decided to open the case and with its lifted lid he held it out to her. "It will give me great pleasure if you'll kindly accept this little ornament."

Jean took it from him—she seemed to study it a moment. "Oh Paul, oh Paul!"—her protest was as sparing as a caress with the back of the hand.

"I thought you might care for the stone," he said.

"It's a rare and perfect one—it's magnificent."

"Well, Miss Armiger told me you would know." There was a hint of relaxed suspense in Paul's tone.

Still holding the case open his companion looked at him a moment. "Did *she* kindly select it?"

He stammered, colouring a little. "No; mother and I did. We went up to London for it; we had the mounting designed and worked out. They took two months. But I showed it to Miss Armiger and she said you'd spot any defect."

"Do you mean," the girl asked, smiling, "that if you had not had her word for that you would have tried me with something inferior?"

Paul continued very grave. "You know well enough what I mean."

Without again noticing the contents of the case she softly closed it and kept it in her hand. "Yes, Paul, I know well enough what you mean." She looked round her; then, as if her old familiarity with him were refreshed and sweetened: "Come and sit down with me." She led the way to a garden bench that stood at a distance from Mrs.

Beever's tea-table, an old green wooden bench that was a perennial feature of the spot. "If Miss Armiger knows that I'm a judge," she pursued as they went, "it's, I think, because she knows everything—except one, which I know better than she." She seated herself, glancing up and putting out her free hand to him with an air of comradeship and trust. Paul let it take his own, which he held there a minute. "I know *you*." She drew him down, and he dropped her hand; whereupon it returned to his little box, which, with the aid of the other, it tightly and nervously clasped. "I can't take your present. It's impossible," she said.

He sat leaning forward with his big red fists on his knees. "Not for your birthday?"

"It's too splendid for that—it's too precious. And how can I take it for that when it isn't for that you offer it? How can I take so much, Paul, when I give you so little? It represents so much more than itself—a thousand more things than I've any right to let you think I can accept. I can't pretend not to know—I must meet you half way. I want to do that so much—to keep our relations happy, happy always, without a break or a cloud. They will be—

they'll be beautiful. We've only to be frank. They *are* now: I feel it in the kind way you listen to me. If you hadn't asked to speak to me I should have asked it myself. Six months ago I promised I would tell you, and I've known the time was come."

"The time is come, but don't tell me till you've given me a chance," said Paul. He had listened without looking at her, his little eyes pricking with their intensity the remotest object they could reach. "I want so to please you—to make you take a favourable view. There isn't a condition you may make, you know, of any sort whatever, that I won't grant you in advance. And if there's any inducement you can name that I've the least capacity to offer, please regard it as offered with all my heart. You know everything—you understand; but just let me repeat that all I am, all I have, all I can ever be or do——"

She laid her hand on his arm as if to help, not to stop him. "Paul, Paul—you're beautiful!" She brushed him with the feather of her tact, but he reddened and continued to avert his big face, as if he were aware that the moment of such an assertion was scarcely the moment to venture to show it.

"You're such a gentleman!" Jean went on—this time with a tremor in her voice that made him turn.

"That's the sort of fine thing I wanted to say to *you*," he said. And he was so accustomed, in any talk, to see his interlocutor suddenly laugh that his look of benevolence covered even her air of being amused by these words.

She smiled at him; she patted his arm. "You've said to me far more than that comes to. I want you—oh, I want you so to be successful and happy!" And her laugh, with an ambiguous sob, suddenly changed into a burst of tears.

She recovered herself, but she had brought tears into his own eyes. "Oh, that's of no consequence! I'm to understand that you'll never, never——?"

"Never, never."

Paul drew a long, low breath. "Do you know that every one has thought you probably would?"

"Certainly, I've known it, and that's why I'm glad of our talk. It ought to have come sooner. *You* thought I probably would, I think——"

"Oh, yes!" Paul artlessly broke in.

Jean laughed again while she wiped her eyes.

"That's why I call you beautiful. You had my possible expectation to meet."

"Oh, yes!" he said again.

"And you were to meet it like a gentleman. I might have—but no matter. You risked your life—you've been magnificent." Jean got up. "And now, to make it perfect, you must take this back."

She put the morocco case into his submissive hand, and he sat staring at it and mechanically turning it round. Unconsciously, musingly he threw it a little way into the air and caught it again. Then he also got up. "They'll be tremendously down on us."

"On 'us'? On me, of course—but why on you?"

"For not having moved you."

"You've moved me immensely. Before *me*—let no one say a word about you!"

"It's of no consequence," Paul repeated.

"Nothing is, if we go on as we are. We're better friends than ever. And we're happy!" Jean announced in her triumph.

He looked at her with deep wistfulness, with patient envy. "*You* are!" Then his eyes took

the direction to which her attention at that moment passed : they showed him Tony Bream coming up the slope with his little girl in his hand. Jean went down instantly to welcome the child, and Paul turned away with a grave face, giving at the same time another impulsive toss to the case containing the token she had declined.

XXI

He directed his face to the house, however, only to find himself in the presence of his mother, who had come back to her tea-table and whom he saw veritably glare at the small object in his hands. From this object her scrutiny jumped to his own countenance, which, to his great discomfort, was not conscious of very successfully baffling it. He knew therefore a momentary relief when her observation attached itself to Jean Martle, whom Tony, planted on the lawn, was also undisguisedly watching and who was already introducing Effie to the treasure laid up in the shade of the tea-table. The girl had caught up the child on her strong young arm, where she sat robust and radiant, befrilled and besashed, hugging the biggest of the dolls ; and in this position—erect, active, laughing, her rosy burden, almost on her shoulder, mingling its brightness with that of her crown of hair, and her other hand grasping, for

Effie's further delight, in the form of another puppet from the pile, a still rosier imitation of it—anticipated quickly the challenge, which, as Paul saw, Mrs. Beever was on the point of addressing her.

“Our wonderful cake's not coming out?”

“It's too big to transport,” said Mrs. Beever: “it's blazing away in the dining-room.”

Jean Martle turned to Tony. “I may carry her in to see it?”

Tony assented. “Only please remember she's not to partake.”

Jean smiled at him. “I'll eat her share!” And she passed swiftly over the lawn while the three pair of eyes followed her.

“She looks,” said Tony, “like the goddess Diana playing with a baby-nymph.”

Mrs. Beever's attention came back to her son. “That's the sort of remark one would expect to hear from *you*! You're not going with her?”

Paul showed vacant and vast. “I'm going in.”

“To the dining-room?”

He wavered. “To speak to Miss Armiger.”

His mother's gaze, sharpened and scared, had

reverted to his morocco case. "To ask her to keep that again?"

At this Paul met her with spirit. "She may keep it for ever!" Giving another toss to his missile, while his companions stared at each other, he took the same direction as Jean.

Mrs. Beever, disconcerted and flushed, broke out on the spot to Tony. "Heaven help us all—she has refused him!"

Tony's face reflected her alarm. "Pray, how do you know?"

"By his having his present to her left on his hands—a jewel a girl would jump at! I came back to hear it was settled——"

"And you haven't heard it's not!"

"What I haven't heard I've seen. That it's 'not' sticks out of them! If she won't accept the gift," Mrs. Beever cried, "how can she accept the giver?"

Tony's appearance, for some seconds, was an echo of her question. "Why, she just promised me she would!"

This only deepened his neighbour's surprise. "Promised *you*——?"

Tony hesitated. "I mean she left me to infer

that I had determined her. She was so good as to listen most appreciatively to what I had to say."

"And, pray, what had you to say?" Mrs. Beever asked with austerity.

In the presence of a rigour so immediate he found himself so embarrassed that he considered. "Well—everything. I took the liberty of urging Paul's claim."

Mrs. Beever stared. "Very good of you! What did you think you had to do with it?"

"Why, whatever my great desire that she should accept him gave me."

"Your great desire that she should accept him? This is the first I've heard of it."

Once more Tony pondered. "Did I never speak of it to you?"

"Never that I can remember. From when does it date?" Mrs. Beever demanded.

"From the moment I really understood how much Paul had to hope."

"How 'much'?" the lady of Eastmead derisively repeated. "It wasn't so much that you need have been at such pains to make it less!"

Tony's comprehension of his friend's discomfiture

was written in the smile of determined good humour with which he met the asperity of her successive inquiries ; but his own uneasiness, which was not the best thing in the world for his temper, showed through this superficial glitter. He looked suddenly as blank as a man can look who looks annoyed. "How in the world could I have supposed I was making it less ?"

Mrs. Beever faltered in her turn. "To answer that question I should need to have been present at your appeal."

Tony's eyes put forth a fire. "It seems to me that your answer, as it is, will do very well for a charge of disloyalty. Do you imply that I didn't act in good faith ?"

"Not even in my sore disappointment. But I imply that you made a gross mistake."

Tony lifted his shoulders ; with his hands in his pockets he had begun to fidget about the lawn—bringing back to her as he did so the worried figure that, in the same attitude, the day of poor Julia's death, she had seen pace the hall at the other house. "But what the deuce then was I to do ?"

"You were to let her alone."

"Ah, but I should have had to begin that earlier!" he exclaimed with ingenuous promptitude.

Mrs. Beever gave a laugh of despair. "Years and years earlier!"

"I mean," returned Tony with a blush, "that from the first of her being here I made a point of giving her the impression of all the good I thought of Paul."

His hostess continued sarcastic. "If it was a question of making points and giving impressions, perhaps then you should have begun later still!" She gathered herself a moment; then she brought out: "You should have let her alone, Tony Bream, because you're madly in love with her!"

Tony dropped into the nearest chair; he sat there looking up at the queen-mother. "Your proof of that's my plea for your son?"

She took full in the face his air of pity for her lapse. "Your plea was not for my son—your plea was for your own danger."

"My own 'danger'?" Tony leaped to his feet again in illustration of his security. "Need I inform you at this time of day that I've such a thing as a conscience?"

"Far from it, my dear man. Exactly what I complain of is that you've quite too much of one." And she gave him, before turning away, what might have been her last look and her last word. "Your conscience is as big as your passion, and if both had been smaller you might perhaps have held your tongue!"

She moved off in a manner that added emphasis to her words, and Tony watched her with his hands still in his pockets and his long legs a little apart. He could turn it over that she accused him, after all, only of having been a particularly injurious fool. "I was under the same impression as you," he said—"the impression that Paul was safe."

This arrested and brought her sharply round. "And were you under the impression that Jean was?"

"On my honour—as far as I'm concerned!"

"It's of course of you we're talking," Mrs. Beaver replied. "If you weren't her motive are you able to suggest who was?"

"Her motive for refusing Paul?" Tony looked at the sky for an inspiration. "I'm afraid I'm too surprised and distressed to have a theory."

"Have you one by chance as to why, if you thought them both so safe, you interfered?"

"'Interfered' is a hard word," said Tony. "I felt a wish to testify to my great sympathy with Paul from the moment I heard—what I didn't at all know—that this was the occasion on which he was, in more senses than one, to present his case."

"May I go so far as to ask," said Mrs. Beever, "if your sudden revelation proceeded from Paul himself?"

"No—not from Paul himself."

"And scarcely from Jean, I suppose?"

"Not in the remotest degree from Jean."

"Thank you," she replied; "you've told me." She had taken her place in a chair and fixed her eyes on the ground. "I've something to tell you myself, though it may not interest you so much." Then raising her eyes: "Dennis Vidal is here."

Tony almost jumped. "In the house?"

"On the river—paddling about." After which, as his blankness grew, "He turned up an hour ago," she explained.

"And no one has seen him?"

"The Doctor and Paul. But Paul didn't know——"

"And didn't ask?" Tony panted.

"What does Paul ever ask? He's too stupid! Besides, with all my affairs, he sees my people come and go. Mr. Vidal vanished when he heard that Miss Armiger's here."

Tony went from surprise to mystification. "Not to come back?"

"On the contrary, I hope, as he took my boat."

"But he wishes not to see her?"

"He's thinking it over."

Tony wondered. "What, then, did he come for?"

Mrs. Beever hung fire. "He came to see Effie."

"Effie?"

"To judge if you're likely to lose her."

Tony threw back his head. "How the devil does that concern him?"

Again Mrs. Beever faltered; then, as she rose, "Hadn't I better leave you to think it out?" she demanded.

Tony, in spite of his bewildered face, thought it out with such effect that in a moment he exclaimed: "Then he still wants that girl?"

"Very much indeed. "That's why he's afraid——"

Tony took her up. "That Effie may die?"

"It's a hideous thing to be talking about," said Mrs. Beever. "But you've perhaps not forgotten who were present——!"

"I've not forgotten who were present! I'm greatly honoured by Mr. Vidal's solicitude," Tony continued; "but I beg you to tell him from me that I think I can take care of my child."

"You must take more care than ever," Mrs. Beever pointedly observed. "But don't mention him to *her*!" she as sharply added. Rose Armiger's white dress and red parasol had reappeared on the steps of the house.

XXII

At the sight of the two persons in the garden Rose came straight down to them, and Mrs. Beever, sombre and sharp, still seeking relief in the opportunity for satire, remarked to her companion in a manner at once ominous and indifferent that her guest was evidently in eager pursuit of him. Tony replied with gaiety that he awaited her with fortitude, and Rose, reaching them, let him know that as she had something more to say to him she was glad he had not, as she feared, quitted the garden. Mrs. Beever hereupon signified her own intention of taking this course: she would leave their visitor, as she said, to Rose to deal with.

Rose smiled with her best grace. "That's as I leave Paul to you. I've just been with him."

Mrs. Beever testified not only to interest, but to approval. "In the library?"

"In the drawing-room." Rose the next moment

conscientiously showed by a further remark her appreciation of the attitude that, on the part of her hostess, she had succeeded in producing. "Miss Martle's in the library."

"And Effie?" Mrs. Beever asked.

"Effie, of course, is where Miss Martle is."

Tony, during this brief colloquy, had lounged away as restlessly as if, instead of beaming on the lady of Eastmead, Rose were watching the master of the other house. He promptly turned round. "I say, dear lady, you know—be kind to her!"

"To Effie?" Mrs. Beever demanded.

"To poor Jean."

Mrs. Beever, after an instant's reflection, took a humorous view of his request. "I don't know why you call her 'poor'! She has declined an excellent settlement, but she's not in misery yet." Then she said to Rose: "I'll take Paul first."

Rose had put down her parasol, pricking the point of it, as if with a certain shyness, into the close, firm lawn. "If you like, when you take Miss Martle——" She paused in deep contemplation of Tony.

"When I take Miss Martle?" There was a new encouragement in Mrs. Beever's voice.

The apparent effect of this benignity was to make Miss Armiger's eyes widen strangely at their companion. "Why, I'll come back and take the child."

Mrs. Beever met this offer with an alertness not hitherto markedly characteristic of her intercourse with Rose. "I'll send her out to you." Then by way of an obeisance to Tony, directing the words well at him: "It won't indeed be a scene for that poor lamb!" She marched off with her duty emblazoned on her square satin back.

Tony, struck by the massive characters in which it was written there, broke into an indulgent laugh, but even in his mirth he traced the satisfaction she took in letting him see that she measured with some complacency the embarrassment Rose might cause him. "Does she propose to tear Miss Martle limb from limb?" he playfully inquired.

"Do you ask that," said Rose, "partly because you're apprehensive that it's what I propose to do to you?"

"By no means, my dear Rose, after your just

giving me so marked a sign of the pacific as your coming round——”

“On the question,” Rose broke in, “of one’s relation to that little image and echo of her adored mother? That isn’t peace, my dear Tony. You give me just the occasion to let you formally know that it’s war.”

Tony gave another laugh. “War?”

“Not on you—I pity you too much.”

“Then on whom?”

Rose hesitated. “On any one, on every one, who may be likely to find that small child—small as she is!—inconvenient. Oh, I know,” she went on, “you’ll say I come late in the day for this and you’ll remind me of how very short a time ago it was that I declined a request of yours to occupy myself with her at all. Only half an hour has elapsed, but what has happened in it has made all the difference.”

She spoke without discernible excitement, and Tony had already become aware that the face she actually showed him was not a thing to make him estimate directly the effect wrought in her by the incongruous result of the influence he had put forth under pressure of her ardour. He needed no great

imagination to conceive that this consequence might, on the poor girl's part, well be mainly lodged in such depths of her nature as not to find an easy or an immediate way to the surface. That he had her to reckon with he was reminded as soon as he caught across the lawn the sheen of her white dress ; but what he most felt was a lively, unreasoning hope that for the hour at least, and until he should have time to turn round and see what his own situation exactly contained for him, her mere incontestable cleverness would achieve a revolution during which he might take breath. This was not a hope that in any way met his difficulties—it was a hope that only avoided them ; but he had lately had a vision of something in which it was still obscure to him whether the bitter or the sweet prevailed, and he was ready to make almost any terms to be allowed to surrender himself to these first quick throbs of response to what was at any rate an impression of perfect beauty. He was in bliss with a great chill and in despair with a great lift, and confused and assured and alarmed—divided between the joy and the pain of knowing that what Jean Martle had done she had done for Tony Bream, and done full in the face of

all he couldn't do to repay her. That Tony Bream might never marry was a simple enough affair, but that this rare creature mightn't suddenly figured to him as formidable and exquisite. Therefore he found his nerves rather indebted to Rose for her being—if that was the explanation—too proud to be vulgarly vindictive. She knew his secret, as even after seeing it so freely handled by Mrs. Beever he still rather artlessly called the motive of his vain appeal ; knew it better than before, since she could now read it in the intenser light of the knowledge of it betrayed by another. If on this advantage he had no reason to look to her for generosity, it was at least a comfort that he might look to her for good manners. Poor Tony had the full consciousness of needing to think out a line, but it weighed somewhat against that oppression to feel that Rose also would have it. He was only a little troubled by the idea that, ardent and subtle, she would probably think faster than he. He turned over a moment the revelation of these qualities conveyed in her announcement of a change, as he might call it, of policy.

“What you say is charming,” he good-naturedly replied, “so far as it represents an accession to the

ranks of my daughter's friends. You will never without touching me remind me how nearly a sister you were to her mother ; and I would rather express the pleasure I take in that than the bewilderment I feel at your allusion to any class of persons whose interest in her may not be sincere. The more friends she has, the better—I welcome you all. The only thing I ask of you," he went on, smiling, "is not to quarrel about her among yourselves."

Rose, as she listened, looked almost religiously calm, but as she answered there was a profane quaver in her voice that told him with what an effort she achieved that sacrifice to form for which he was so pusillanimously grateful. "It's very good of you to make the best of me ; and it's also very clever of you, let me add, my dear Tony—and add with all deference to your goodness—to succeed in implying that any other course is open to you. You may welcome me as a friend of the child or not. I'm present for her, at any rate, and present as I've never been before."

Tony's gratitude, suddenly contracting, left a little edge for irritation. "You're present, assuredly, my dear Rose, and your presence is to us all an

advantage of which, happily, we never become unconscious for an hour. But do I understand that the firm position among us that you allude to is one to which you see your way to attaching any possibility of permanence?"

She waited as if scrupulously to detach from its stem the flower of irony that had sprouted in this speech, and while she inhaled it she gave her visible attention only to the little hole in the lawn that she continued to prick with the point of her parasol. "If that's a graceful way of asking me," she returned at last, "whether the end of my visit here isn't near at hand, perhaps the best satisfaction I can give you is to say that I shall probably stay on at least as long as Miss Martle. What I meant, however, just now," she pursued, "by saying that I'm more on the spot than heretofore, is simply that while I do stay I stay to be vigilant. That's what I hurried out to let you definitely know, in case you should be going home without our meeting again. I told you before I went into the house that I trusted you—I needn't recall to you for what. Mr. Beever after a while came in and told me that Miss Martle had refused him. Then I felt that, after what

had passed between us, it was only fair to say to you——”

“That you've ceased to trust me?” Tony interjected.

“By no means. I don't give and take back.” And though his companion's handsome head, with its fixed, pale face, rose high, it became appreciably handsomer and reached considerably higher, while she wore once more the air of looking at his mistake through the enlarging blur of tears. “As I believe you did, in honour, what you could for Mr. Beever, I trust you perfectly still.”

Tony smiled as if he apologised, but as if also he couldn't but wonder. “Then it's only fair to say to me——?”

“That I don't trust Miss Martle.”

“Oh, my dear woman!” Tony precipitately laughed.

But Rose went on with all deliberation and distinctness. “That's what has made the difference—that's what has brought me, as you say, round to a sense of my possible use, or rather of my clear obligation. Half an hour ago I knew how much you loved her. Now I know how much she loves you.”

Tony's laugh suddenly dropped ; he showed the face of a man for whom a joke has sharply turned grave. " And what is it that, in possession of this admirable knowledge, you see——?"

Rose faltered ; but she had not come so far simply to make a botch of it. " Why, that it's the obvious interest of the person we speak of not to have too stupid a patience with any obstacle to her marrying you."

This speech had a quiet lucidity of which the odd action was for an instant to make him lose breath so violently that, in his quick gasp, he felt sick. In the indignity of the sensation he struck out. " Pray, why is it the person's obvious interest any more than it's yours ?"

" Seeing that I love you quite as much as she does ? Because you don't love me quite so much as you love *her*. That's exactly ' why,' dear Tony Bream !" said Rose Armiger.

She turned away from him sadly and nobly, as if she had done with him and with the subject, and he stood where she had left him, gazing at the foolish greenness at his feet and slowly passing his hand over his head. In a few seconds, however, he heard

her utter a strange, short cry, and, looking round, saw her face to face—across the interval of sloping lawn—with a gentleman whom he had been sufficiently prepared to recognise on the spot as Dennis Vidal.

XXIII

HE had, in this preparation, the full advantage of Rose, who, quite thrown for the moment off her balance, was vividly unable to give any account of the apparition which should be profitable to herself. The violence of her surprise made her catch the back of the nearest chair, on which she covertly rested, directing at her old suitor from this position the widest eyes the master of Bounds had ever seen her unwittingly open. To perceive this, however, was to be almost simultaneously struck, and even to be not a little charmed, with the clever quickness of her recovery—that of a person constitutionally averse to making unmeasured displays. Rose was capable of astonishment, as she was capable of other kinds of emotion ; but she was as little capable of giving way to it as she was of giving way to other kinds ; so that both of her companions immediately saw her moved by the sense that a perturbing incident could at the

worst do her no such evil turn as she might suffer by taking it in the wrong way. Tony became aware, in addition, that the fact communicated to him by Mrs. Beaver gave him an advantage even over the poor fellow whose face, as he stood there, showed the traces of an insufficient forecast of two things: one of them the influence on all his pulses of the sight again, after such an interval, and in the high insolence of life and strength, of the woman he had lost and still loved; the other the instant effect on his imagination of his finding her intimately engaged with the man who had been, however without fault, the occasion of her perversity. Vidal's marked alertness had momentarily failed him; he paused in his advance long enough to give Tony, after noting and regretting his agitation, time to feel that Rose was already as colourlessly bland as a sensitive woman could wish to be.

All this made the silence, however brief—and it was much briefer than my account of it—vibrate to such a tune as to prompt Tony to speak as soon as possible in the interest of harmony. What directly concerned him was that he had last seen Vidal as his own duly appreciative guest, and he offered him

a hand freely charged with reminders of that quality. He was refreshed and even a little surprised to observe that the young man took it, after all, without stiffness; but the strangest thing in the world was that as he cordially brought him up the bank he had a mystic glimpse of the fact that Rose Armiger, with her heart in her throat, was waiting for some sign as to whether she might, for the benefit of her intercourse with himself, safely take the ground of having expected what had happened—having perhaps even brought it about. She naturally took counsel of her fears, and Tony, suddenly more elated than he could have given a reason for being, was ready to concur in any attempt she might make to save her appearance of knowing no reproach. Yet, foreseeing the awkwardness that might arise from her committing herself too rashly, he made haste to say to Dennis that he would have been startled if he had not been forewarned: Mrs. Beever had mentioned to him the visit she had just received.

“Ah, she told you?” Dennis asked.

“Me only—as a great sign of confidence,” Tony laughed.

Rose, at this, could be amazed with superiority.
"What?—you've already been here?"

"An hour ago," said Dennis. "I asked Mrs. Beever not to tell you."

That was a chance for positive criticism. "She obeyed your request to the letter. But why in the world such portentous secrecy?" Rose spoke as if there was no shade of a reason for his feeling shy, and now gave him an excellent example of the right tone. She had emulated Tony's own gesture of welcome, and he said to himself that no young woman could have stretched a more elastic arm across a desert of four cold years.

"I can explain to you better," Dennis replied, "why I emerged than why I vanished."

"You emerged, I suppose, because you wanted to see me." Rose spoke to one of her admirers, but she looked, she even laughed, at the other, showing him by this time an aspect completely and inscrutably renewed. "You knew I was here?"

"At Wilverley?" Dennis hesitated. "I took it for granted."

"I'm afraid it was really for Miss Armiger you came," Tony remarked in the spirit of pleasantry.

It seemed to him that the spirit of pleasantry would help them on.

It had its result—it proved contagious. “I would still say so—before her—even if it weren’t!” Dennis returned.

Rose took up the joke. “Fortunately it’s true—so it saves you a fib.”

“It saves me a fib!” Dennis said.

In this way the trick was successfully played—they found their feet; with the added amusement for Tony of hearing the necessary falsehood uttered neither by himself nor by Rose, but by a man whose veracity, from the first, on that earlier day, of looking at him, he had felt to be almost incompatible with the flow of conversation. It was more and more distinct while the minutes elapsed that the secondary effect of her old friend’s reappearance was to make Rose shine with a more convenient light; and she met her embarrassment, every way, with so happy an art that Tony was moved to deplore afresh the complication that estranged him from a woman of such gifts. It made up indeed a little for this that he was also never so possessed of his own as when there was something to carry off

or to put, as the phrase was, through. His light hand, his slightly florid facility were the things that in managing, in presiding, had rendered him so widely popular ; and wasn't he, precisely, a little presiding, wasn't he a good deal managing just now ? Vidal would be a blessed diversion—especially if he should be pressed into the service as one : Tony was content for the moment to see this with eagerness rather than to see it whole. His eagerness was quite justified by the circumstance that the young man from China did somehow or other—the reasons would appear after the fact—represent relief, relief not made vain by the reflection that it was perhaps only temporary. Rose herself, thank heaven, was, with all her exaltation, only temporary. He could already condone the officiousness of a gentleman too interested in Effie's equilibrium : the grounds of that indiscretion gleamed agreeably through it as soon as he had seen the visitor's fingers draw together over the hand held out by Rose. It was matter to whistle over, to bustle over, that, as had been certified by Mrs. Beever, the passion betrayed by that clasp had survived its shipwreck, and there wasn't a rope's end Tony could throw, or a stray

stick he could hold out, for which he didn't immediately cast about him. He saw indeed from this moment his whole comfort in the idea of an organised rescue and of making the struggling swimmer know, as a preliminary, how little any one at the other house was interested in preventing him to land.

Dennis had, for that matter, not been two minutes in touch with him before he really began to see this happy perception descend. It was, in a manner, to haul him ashore to invite him to dine and sleep; which Tony lost as little time as possible in doing; expressing the hope that he had not gone to the inn and that even if he had he would consent to the quick transfer of his effects to Bounds. Dennis showed that he had still some wonder for such an overture, but before he could respond to it the words were taken out of his mouth by Rose, whose recovery from her upset was complete from the moment she could seize a pretext for the extravagance of tranquillity.

"Why should you take him away from us and why should he consent to be taken? Won't Mrs. Beaver," Rose asked of Dennis—"since you're not

snatching the fearful joy of a clandestine visit to her—expect you, if you stay anywhere, to give her the preference?”

“Allow me to remind you, and to remind Mr. Vidal,” Tony returned, “that when he was here before he gave her the preference. Mrs. Beever made no scruple of removing him bodily from under my roof. I forfeited—I was obliged to—the pleasure of a visit to him. But that leaves me with my loss to make up and my revenge to take—I repay Mrs. Beever in kind.” To find Rose disputing with him the possession of their friend filled him with immediate cheer. “Don’t you recognise,” he went on to him, “the propriety of what I propose? I take you and deal with Mrs. Beever, as she took you and dealt with me. Besides, your things have not even been brought here as they had of old been brought to Bounds. I promise to share you with these ladies and not to grudge you the time you may wish to spend with Miss Armiger. I understand but too well the number of hours I shall find you putting in. You shall pay me a long visit and come over here as often as you like, and your presence at Bounds may even possibly have the consequence of making

them honour me there a little oftener with their own."

Dennis looked from one of his companions to the other ; he struck Tony as slightly mystified, but not beyond the point at which curiosity was agreeable. "I think I had better go to Mr. Bream," he after a moment sturdily said to Rose. "There's a matter on which I wish to talk with you, but I don't see that that need prevent."

"It's for you to determine. There's a matter on which I find myself, to you also, particularly glad of the opportunity of saying a word."

Tony glanced promptly at his watch and at Rose, "Your opportunity's before you—say your word now. I've a little job in the town," he explained to Dennis ; "I must attend to it quickly and I can easily stop at the hotel and give directions for the removal of your traps. All you will have to do then will be to take the short way, which you know—over the bridge there and through my garden—to my door. We shall dine at an easy eight."

Dennis Vidal assented to this arrangement without qualification and indeed almost without expression : there evidently lingered in him an operative sense

that there were compensations Mr. Bream might be allowed the luxurious consciousness of owing him. Rose, however, showed she still had a communication to make to Tony, who had begun to move in the quarter leading straight from Eastmead to the town, so that he would have to pass near the house on going out. She introduced it with a question about his movements. "You'll stop, then, on your way and tell Mrs. Beever——?"

"Of my having appropriated our friend? Not this moment," said Tony—"I've to meet a man on business, and I shall only just have time. I shall if possible come back here, but meanwhile perhaps you'll kindly explain. Come straight over and take possession," he added, to Vidal; "make yourself at home—don't wait for me to return to you." He offered him a hand-shake again, and then, with his native impulse to accommodate and to harmonise making a friendly light in his face, he offered one to Rose herself. She accepted it so frankly that she even for a minute kept his hand—a response that he approved with a smile so encouraging that it scarcely needed even the confirmation of speech. They stood there while Dennis Vidal turned away as

if they might have matters between them, and Tony yielded to the impulse to prove to Rose that though there were things he kept from her he kept nothing that was not absolutely necessary. "There's something else I've got to do—I've got to stop at the Doctor's."

Rose raised her eyebrows. "To consult him?"

"To ask him to come over."

"I hope you're not ill."

"Never better in my life. I want him to see Effie."

"She's not ill surely?"

"She's not right—with the fright Gorham had this morning. So I'm not satisfied."

"Let him then by all means see her," Rose said.

Their talk had, through the action of Vidal's presence, dropped from its chilly height to the warmest domestic level, and what now stuck out of Tony was the desire she should understand that on such ground as that he was always glad to meet her. Dennis Vidal faced about again in time to be called, as it were, if only by the tone of his host's voice, to witness this. "*A bientôt*. Let me hear from you

—and from him—that in my absence you’ve been extremely kind to our friend here.”

Rose, with a small but vivid fever-spot in her cheek, looked from one of the men to the other, while her kindled eyes showed a gathered purpose that had the prompt and perceptible effect of exciting suspense. “I don’t mind letting you know, Mr. Bream, in advance exactly how kind I shall be. It would be affectation on my part to pretend to be unaware of your already knowing something of what has passed between this gentleman and me. He suffered, at my hands, in this place, four years ago, a disappointment—a disappointment into the rights and wrongs, into the good reasons of which I won’t attempt to go further than just to say that an inevitable publicity then attached to it.” She spoke with slow and deliberate clearness, still looking from Tony to Dennis and back again; after which her strange intensity fixed itself on her old suitor. “People saw, Mr. Vidal,” she went on, “the blight that descended on our long relations, and people believed—and I was at the time indifferent to their believing—that it had occurred by my act. I’m not indifferent now—that is to any appearance of having been

wanting in consideration for such a man as you. I've often wished I might make you some reparation—some open atonement. I'm sorry for the distress that I'm afraid I caused you, and here, before the principal witness of the indignity you so magnanimously met, I very sincerely express my regret and very humbly beg your forgiveness." Dennis Vidal, staring at her, had turned dead white as she kept it up, and the elevation, as it were, of her abasement had brought tears into Tony's eyes. She saw them there as she looked at him once more, and she measured the effect she produced upon him. She visibly and excusably enjoyed it and after a moment's pause she handsomely and pathetically completed it. "*That*, Mr. Bream—for your injunction of kindness—is the kindness I'm capable of showing."

Tony turned instantly to their companion, who now stood staring hard at the ground. "I change, then, my appeal—I make it, with confidence, to *you*. Let me hear, Mr. Vidal, when we meet again, that you've not been capable of less!" Dennis, deeply moved, it was plain, but self-conscious and stiff, gave no sign of having heard him; and Rose, on her side, walked a little away like an actress who has launched

her great stroke. Tony, between them, hesitated ; then he laughed in a manner that showed he felt safe. "Oh, you're both all right!" he declared ; and with another glance at his watch he bounded off to his business. He drew, as he went, a long breath—filled his lungs with the sense that he should after all have a margin. She would take Dennis back.

XXIV

"WHY did you do that?" Dennis asked as soon as he was alone with Rose.

She had sunk into a seat at a distance from him, all spent with her great response to her sudden opportunity for justice. His challenge brought her flight to earth; and after waiting a moment she answered him with a question that betrayed her sense of coming down. "Do you really care, after all this time, what I do or don't do?"

His rejoinder to this was in turn only another demand. "What business is it of his that you may have done this or that to me? What has passed between us is still between us: nobody else has anything to do with it."

Rose smiled at him as if to thank him for being again a trifle sharp with her. "He wants me, as he said, to be kind to you."

"You mean he wants you to do *that* sort of

thing?" His sharpness brought him step by step across the lawn and nearer to her. "Do you care so very much what he wants?"

Again she hesitated; then, with her pleased, patient smile, she tapped the empty place on the bench. "Come and sit down beside me, and I'll tell you how much I care." He obeyed her, but not precipitately, approaching her with a deliberation which still held her off a little, made her objective to his inspection or his mistrust. He had said to Mrs. Beever that he had not come to watch her, but we are at liberty to wonder what Mrs. Beever might have called the attitude in which, before seating himself, he stopped before her with a silent stare. She met him at any rate with a face that told him there was no scrutiny she was now enough in the wrong to fear, a face that was all the promise of confession and submission and sacrifice. She tapped again upon her bench, and at this he sat down. Then she went on: "When did you come back?"

"To England? The other day—I don't remember which of them. I think you ought to answer my question," Dennis said, "before asking any more of your own."

"No, no," she replied, promptly but gently; "there's an inquiry it seems to me I've a right to make of you before I admit yours to make any at all." She looked at him as if to give him time either to assent or to object; but he only sat rather stiffly back and let her see how fine and firm the added years had hammered him. "What are you really here for? Has it anything to do with *me*?"

Dennis remained profoundly grave. "I didn't know you were here—I had no reason to," he at last replied.

"Then you simply desired the pleasure of renewing your acquaintance with Mrs. Beever?"

"I came to ask her about you."

"How beautiful of you!"—and Rose's tone, untinged with irony, rang out as clear as the impulse it praised. "Fancy your caring!" she added; after which she continued: "As I understand you, then, you've had your chance, you've talked with her?"

"A very short time. I put her a question or two."

"I won't ask you what they were," said Rose, "I'll only say that, since I happen to be here, it may be a comfort to you not to have to content

yourself with information at second-hand. Ask *me* what you like. I'll tell you everything."

Her companion considered. "You might then begin by telling me what I've already asked."

She took him up before he could go on. "Oh, why I attached an importance to his hearing what I just now said? Yes, yes; you shall have it." She turned it over as if with the sole thought of giving it to him with the utmost lucidity; then she was visibly struck with the help she should derive from knowing just one thing more. "But first—are you at all jealous of him?"

Dennis Vidal broke into a laugh which might have been a tribute to her rare audacity, yet which somehow, at the same time, made him seem only more serious. "That's a thing for you to find out for yourself!"

"I see—I see." She looked at him with musing, indulgent eyes. "It would be too wonderful. Yet otherwise, after all, why should you care?"

"I don't mind telling you frankly," said Dennis, while, with two fingers softly playing upon her lower lip, she sat estimating the possibility she had named—"I don't mind telling you frankly that I

asked Mrs. Beever if you were still in love with him."

She clasped her hands so eagerly that she almost clapped them. "Then you do care?"

He was looking beyond her now—at something at the other end of the garden; and he made no other reply than to say: "She didn't give you away."

"It was very good of her; but I would tell you myself, you know, perfectly, if I were."

"You didn't tell me perfectly four years ago," Dennis returned.

Rose hesitated a minute; but this didn't prevent her speaking with an effect of great promptitude. "Oh, four years ago I was the biggest fool in England!"

Dennis, at this, met her eyes again. "Then what I asked Mrs. Beever——"

"Isn't true?" Rose caught him up. "It's an exquisite position," she said, "for a woman to be questioned as you question me, and to have to answer as I answer you. But it's your revenge, and you've already seen that to your revenge I minister with a certain amount of resolution." She

let him look at her a minute; at last she said without flinching: "I'm not in love with Anthony Bream."

Dennis shook his head sadly. "What does that do for my revenge?"

Rose had another quick flush. "It shows you what I consent to discuss with you," she rather proudly replied.

He turned his eyes back to the quarter to which he had directed them before. "You do consent?"

"Can you ask—after what I've done?"

"Well, then, *he* no longer cares——?"

"For me?" said Rose. "He never cared."

"Never?"

"Never."

"Upon your honour?"

"Upon my honour."

"But you had an idea——?" Dennis bravely pursued.

Rose as dauntlessly met him. "I had an idea."

"And you've had to give it up?"

"I've had to give it up."

Dennis was silent; he slowly got upon his feet.

"Well, *that* does something."

"For your revenge?" She sounded a bitter laugh. "I should think it might! What it does is magnificent!"

He stood looking over her head till at last he exclaimed: "So, apparently, is the child!"

"She has come?" Rose sprang up to find that Effie had been borne toward them, across the grass, in the arms of the muscular Manning, who, having stooped to set her down and given her a vigorous impulsion from behind, recovered the military stature and posture.

"You're to take her, miss, please—from Mrs. Beever. And you're to keep her."

Rose had already greeted the little visitor. "Please assure Mrs. Beever that I will. She's with Miss Martle?"

"She is indeed, miss."

Manning always spoke without emotion, and the effect of it on this occasion was to give her the air of speaking without pity.

Rose, however, didn't mind that. "She may trust me," she said, while Manning saluted and retired. Then she stood before her old suitor with Effie blooming on her shoulder.

He frankly wondered and admired. "She's magnificent—she's magnificent!" he repeated.

"She's magnificent!" Rose ardently echoed. "Aren't you, my very own?" she demanded of the child, with a sudden passion of tenderness.

"What did he mean about her wanting the Doctor? She'll see us *all* through—every blessed one of us!" Dennis gave himself up to his serious interest, an odd, voracious manner of taking her in from top to toe.

"You look at her like an ogre!" Rose laughed, moving away from him with her burden and pressing to her lips as she went a little plump pink arm. She pretended to munch it; she covered it with kisses; she gave way to the joy of her renounced abstention. "See us all through? I hope so! Why shouldn't you, darling, why shouldn't you? You've got a *real* friend, you have, you duck; and she sees you know what you've got by the wonderful way you look at her!" This was to attribute to the little girl's solemn stare a vividness of meaning which moved Dennis to hilarity; Rose's profession of confidence made her immediately turn her round face over her friend's shoulder to the

gentleman who was strolling behind and whose public criticism, as well as his public mirth, appeared to arouse in her only a soft sense of superiority. Rose sat down again where she had sat before, keeping Effie in her lap and smoothing out her fine feathers. Then their companion, after a little more detached contemplation, also took his former place.

"She makes me remember!" he presently observed.

"That extraordinary scene—poor Julia's message? You can fancy whether *I* forget it!"

Dennis was silent a little; after which he said quietly: "You've more to keep it in mind."

"I can assure you I've plenty!" Rose replied.

"And the young lady who was also present—isn't she the Miss Martle——?"

"Whom I spoke of to that woman? She's the Miss Martle. What about her?" Rose asked with her cheek against the child's.

"Does she also remember?"

"Like you and me? I haven't the least idea."

Once more Dennis paused; his pauses were filled with his friendly gaze at their small companion.

"She's here again—like you?"

"And like you?" Rose smiled. "No, not like either of us. She's always here."

"And it's from her you're to keep a certain little person?"

"It's from her." Rose spoke with rich brevity.

Dennis hesitated. "Would you trust the little person to another little person?"

"To you—to hold?" Rose looked amused. "Without a pang!" The child, at this, profoundly meditative and imperturbably "good," submitted serenely to the transfer and to the prompt, long kiss which, as he gathered her to him, Dennis, in his turn, imprinted on her arm. "I'll stay with *you*!" she declared with expression; on which he renewed, with finer relish, the freedom she permitted, assuring her that this settled the question and that he was her appointed champion. Rose watched the scene between them, which was charming; then she brought out abruptly: "What I said to Mr. Bream just now I didn't say for Mr. Bream."

Dennis had the little girl close to him; his arms were softly round her and, like Rose's just before, his cheek, as he tenderly bent his head, was pressed

against her cheek. His eyes were on their companion. "You said it for Mr. Vidal? He liked it, all the same, better than I," he replied in a moment.

"Of course he liked it! But it doesn't matter what he likes," Rose added. "As for you—I don't know that your 'liking' it was what I wanted."

"What then did you want?"

"That you should see me utterly abased—and all the more utterly that it was in the cruel presence of another."

Dennis had raised his head and sunk back into the angle of the bench, separated from her by such space as it yielded. His face, presented to her over Effie's curls, was a combat of mystifications. "Why in the world should that give me pleasure?"

"Why in the world shouldn't it?" Rose asked.

"What's your revenge but pleasure?"

She had got up again in her dire restlessness; she glowed there in the perversity of her sacrifice. If he hadn't come to Wilverley to watch her, his wonder-stricken air much wronged him. He shook his head again with his tired patience. "Oh, damn pleasure!" he exclaimed.

"It's nothing to you?" Rose cried. "Then if it isn't, perhaps you pity me?" She shone at him as if with the glimpse of a new hope.

He took it in, but he only, after a moment, echoed, ambiguously, her word. "Pity you?"

"I think you would, Dennis, if you understood."

He looked at her hard; he hesitated. At last he returned quietly, but relentingly: "Well, Rose, I *don't* understand."

"Then I must go through it all—I must empty the cup. Yes, I must tell you."

She paused so long, however, beautiful, candid and tragic, looking in the face her necessity, but gathering herself for her effort, that, after waiting a while, he spoke. "Tell me what?"

"That I'm simply at your feet. That I'm yours to do what you will with—to take or to cast away. Perhaps you'll care a little for your triumph," she said, "when you see in it the grand opportunity I give you. It's *your* turn to refuse now—you can treat me exactly as you were treated!"

A deep, motionless silence followed, between them, this speech, which left them confronted as if

it had rather widened than bridged their separation. Before Dennis found his answer to it the sharp tension snapped in a clear, glad exclamation. The child threw out her arms and her voice: "Auntie Jean, Auntie Jean!"

XXV

THE others had been so absorbed that they had not seen Jean Martle approach, and she, on her side, was close to them before appearing to perceive a stranger in the gentleman who held Effie in his lap and whom she had the air of having assumed, at a greater distance, to be Anthony Bream. Effie's reach towards her friend was so effective that, with Vidal's obligation to rise, it enabled her to slip from his hands and rush to avail herself of the embrace offered her, in spite of a momentary arrest, by Jean. Rose, however, at the sight of this movement, was quicker than Jean to catch her; she seized her almost with violence, and, holding her as she had held her before, dropped again upon the bench and presented her as a yielding captive. This act of appropriation was confirmed by the flash of a fine glance—a single gleam, but direct—which, however, producing in Jean's fair face no retort, had only the

effect of making her look, in gracious recognition, at Dennis. He had evidently, for the moment, nothing but an odd want of words to meet her with ; but this, precisely, gave her such a sense of having disturbed a scene of intimacy that, to be doubly courteous, she said : " Perhaps you remember me. We were here together——"

" Four years ago—perfectly," Rose broke in, speaking for him with an amenity that might have been intended as a quick corrective of any impression conveyed by her grab of the child. " Mr. Vidal and I were just talking of you. He has come back, for the first time since then, to pay us a little visit."

" Then he has things to say to you that I've rudely interrupted. Please excuse me—I'm off again," Jean went on to Dennis. " I only came for the little girl." She turned back to Rose. " I'm afraid it's time I should take her home."

Rose sat there like a queen-regent with a baby sovereign on her knee. " Must I give her up to you ?"

" I'm responsible for her, you know, to Gorham," Jean returned.

Rose gravely kissed her little ward, who, now that she was apparently to be offered the entertainment of a debate in which she was so closely concerned, was clearly prepared to contribute to it the calmness of impartial beauty at a joust. She was just old enough to be interested, but she was just young enough to be judicial; the lap of her present friend had the compass of a small child-world, and she perched there in her loveliness as if she had been Helen on the walls of Troy. "It's not to Gorman *I'm* responsible," Rose presently answered.

Jean took it good-humouredly. "Are you to Mr. Bream?"

"I'll tell you presently to whom." And Rose looked intelligently at Dennis Vidal.

Smiled at in alternation by two clever young women, he had yet not sufficiently to achieve a jocose manner shaken off his sense of the strange climax of his conversation with the elder of them. He turned away awkwardly, as he had done four years before, for the hat it was one of the privileges of such a colloquy to make him put down in an odd place. "I'll go over to Bounds," he said to Rose.

And then to Jean, to take leave of her : "I'm staying at the other house."

"Really ? Mr. Bream didn't tell me. But I must never drive you away. You've more to say to Miss Armiger than I have. I've only come to get Effie," Jean repeated.

Dennis at this, brushing off his recovered hat, gave way to his thin laugh. "That apparently may take you some time !"

Rose generously helped him off. "I've more to say to Miss Martle than I've now to say to you. I think that what I've already said to you is quite enough.

"Thanks, thanks—quite enough. I'll just go over."

"You won't go first to Mrs. Beever ?"

"Not yet—I'll come in this evening. Thanks, thanks !" Dennis repeated with a sudden dramatic gaiety that was presumably intended to preserve appearances—to acknowledge Rose's aid and, in a spirit of reciprocity, cover any exposure she might herself have incurred. Raising his hat, he passed down the slope and disappeared, leaving our young ladies face to face.

Their situation might still have been embarrassing had Rose not taken immediate measures to give it a lift. "You must let me have the pleasure of making you the first person to hear of a matter that closely concerns me." She hung fire, watching her companion; then she brought out: "I'm engaged to be married to Mr. Vidal."

"Engaged?"—Jean almost bounded forward, holding up her relief like a torch.

Rose greeted with laughter this natural note. "He arrived half an hour ago, for a supreme appeal—and it has not, you see, taken long. I've just had the honour of accepting him."

Jean's movement had brought her so close to the bench that, though slightly disconcerted by its action on her friend, she could only, in consistency, seat herself. "That's very charming—I congratulate you."

"It's charming of you to be so glad," Rose returned. "However, you've the news in all its freshness."

"I appreciate that too," said Jean. "But fancy my dropping on a conversation of such importance!"

"Fortunately you didn't cut it short. We had settled the question. He had got his answer."

"If I had known it I would have congratulated Mr. Vidal," Jean pursued.

"You would have frightened him out of his wits—he's so dreadfully shy," Rose laughed.

"Yes—I could see he was dreadfully shy. But the great thing," Jean candidly observed, "is that he was not too dreadfully shy to come back to you."

Rose continued to be moved to mirth. "Oh, I don't mean with *me*! He's as bold with me as I am—for instance—with you." Jean had not touched the child, but Rose smoothed out her ribbons as if to redress some previous freedom. "You'll think that says everything. I can easily imagine how you judge my frankness," she added. "But of course I'm grossly immodest—I always was."

Jean wistfully watched her light hands play here and there over Effie's adornments. "I think you're a person of great courage—if you'll let me also be frank. There's nothing in the world I admire so much—for I don't consider that I've, myself, a great deal. I daresay, however, that I should let you know just as soon if I were engaged."

"Which, unfortunately, is exactly what you're not!" Rose, having finished her titivation of the child, sank comfortably back on the bench. "Do you object to my speaking to you of that?" she asked.

Jean hesitated; she had only after letting them escape become conscious of the reach of her words, the inadvertence of which showed how few waves of emotion her scene with Paul Beever had left to subside. She coloured as she replied: "I don't know how much you know."

"I know everything," said Rose. "Mr. Beever has already told me."

Jean's flush, at this, deepened. "Mr. Beever already doesn't care!"

"That's fortunate for you, my dear! Will you let me tell you," Rose continued, "how much *I* do?"

Jean again hesitated, looking, however, through her embarrassment, very straight and sweet. "I don't quite see that it's a thing you should tell me or that I'm really obliged to hear. It's very good of you to take an interest——"

"But however good it may be, it's none of my business: is that what you mean?" Rose broke in. "Such an answer is doubtless natural enough.

My having hoped you would accept Paul Beever, and above all my having rather publicly expressed that hope, is an apparent stretch of discretion that you're perfectly free to take up. But you must allow me to say that the stretch is more apparent than real. There's discretion and discretion—and it's all a matter of motive. Perhaps you can guess mine for having found a reassurance in the idea of your definitely bestowing your hand. It's a very small and a very pretty hand, but its possible action is out of proportion to its size and even to its beauty. It was not a question of meddling in your affairs—your affairs were only one side of the matter. My interest was wholly in the effect of your marriage on the affairs of others. Let me say, moreover," Rose went smoothly and inexorably on, while Jean, listening intently, drew shorter breaths and looked away, as if in growing pain, from the wonderful white, mobile mask that supplied half the meaning of this speech—"let me say, moreover, that it strikes me you hardly treat me with fairness in forbidding me an allusion that has after all so much in common with the fact, in my own situation, as to which you've no scruple

in showing me your exuberant joy. You clap your hands over *my* being—if you'll forgive the vulgarity of my calling things by their names—got out of the way; yet I must suffer in silence to see you rather more in it than ever."

Jean turned again upon her companion a face bewildered and alarmed: unguardedly stepping into water that she had believed shallow, she found herself caught up in a current of fast-moving depths—a cold, full tide that set straight out to sea. "Where *am* I?" her scared silence seemed for the moment to ask. Her quick intelligence indeed, came to her aid, and she spoke in a voice out of which she showed that she tried to keep her heart-beats. "You call things, certainly, by names that are extraordinary; but I, at any rate, follow you far enough to be able to remind you that what I just said about your engagement was provoked by your introducing the subject."

Rose was silent a moment, but without prejudice, clearly, to her firm possession of the ground she stood on—a power to be effectively cool in exact proportion as her interlocutress was troubled. "I introduced the subject for two reasons. One of

them was that your eager descent upon us at that particular moment seemed to present you in the light of an inquirer whom it would be really rude not to gratify. The other was just to see if you would succeed in restraining your glee."

"Then your story isn't true?" Jean asked with a promptitude that betrayed the limits of her circumspection.

"There you are again!" Rose laughed. "Do you know your apprehensions are barely decent? I haven't, however, laid a trap with a bait that's all make-believe. It's perfectly true that Mr. Vidal has again pressed me hard—it's not true that I've yet given him an answer completely final. But as I mean to at the earliest moment, you can say so to whomever you like."

"I can surely leave the saying so to *you*!" Jean returned. "But I shall be sorry to appear to have treated you with a want of confidence that may give you a complaint to make on the score of my manners—as to which you set me too high an example by the rare perfection of your own. Let me simply let you know, then, to cover every possibility of that sort, that I intend, under no

circumstances—ever—ever—to marry. So far as that knowledge may satisfy you, you're welcome to the satisfaction. Perhaps in consideration of it," Jean wound up, with an effect that must have struck her own ear as the greatest she had ever produced—"perhaps in consideration of it you'll kindly do what I ask you."

The poor girl was destined to see her effect reduced to her mere personal sense of it. Rose made no movement save to lay her hands on Effie's shoulders, while that young lady looked up at the friend of other occasions in round-eyed detachment, following the talk enough for curiosity, but not enough either for comprehension or for agitation. "You take my surrender for granted, I suppose, because you've worked so long to produce the impression, which no one, for your good fortune, has gainsaid, that she's safe only in your hands. But *I* gainsay it at last, for her safety becomes a very different thing from the moment you give such a glimpse of your open field as you must excuse my still continuing to hold that you do give. My 'knowledge'—to use your term—that you'll never marry has exactly as much and as

little weight as your word for it. I leave it to your conscience to estimate that wonderful amount. You say too much—both more than I ask you and more than I can oblige you by prescribing to myself to take seriously. You do thereby injustice to what must be always on the cards for you—the possible failure of the great impediment. *I'm* disinterested in the matter—I shall marry, as I've had the honour to inform you, without having to think at all of impediments or failures. That's the difference between us, and it seems to me that it alters everything. I had a delicacy—but now I've nothing in the world but a fear."

Jean had got up before these remarks had gone far, but even though she fell back a few steps her dismay was a force that condemned her to take them in. "God forbid I should understand you," she panted; "I only make out that you say and mean horrible things and that you're doing your best to seek a quarrel with me from which you shall derive some advantage that, I'm happy to feel, is beyond my conception." Both the women were now as pale as death, and Rose was brought to her feet by the pure passion of this retort. The manner

of it was such as to leave Jean nothing but to walk away, which she instantly proceeded to do. At the end of ten paces, however, she turned to look at their companion, who stood beside Rose, held by the hand, and whom, as if from a certain consideration for infant innocence and a certain instinct of fair play, she had not attempted to put on her side by a single direct appeal from intimate eyes. This appeal she now risked, and the way the little girl's face mutely met it suddenly precipitated her to blind supplication. She became weak—she broke down. "I beseech you to let me have her."

Rose Armiger's countenance made no secret of her appreciation of this collapse. "I'll let you have her on one condition," she presently replied.

"What condition?"

"That you deny to me on the spot that you've but one feeling in your soul. Oh, don't look vacant and dazed," Rose derisively pursued; "don't look as if you didn't know what feeling I mean! Renounce it—repudiate it, and I'll never touch her again!"

Jean gazed in sombre stupefaction. "I know what feeling you mean," she said at last, "and

I'm incapable of meeting your condition. I 'deny,' I 'renounce,' I 'repudiate' as little as I hope, as I dream, or as I feel that I'm likely ever again even to utter——!" Then she brought out in her baffled sadness, but with so little vulgarity of pride that she sounded, rather, a note of compassion for a perversity so deep: "It's because of *that* that I want her!"

"Because you adore him—and she's his?"

Jean faltered, but she was launched. "Because I adore him—and she's his."

"*I* want her for another reason," Rose declared. "I adored her poor mother—and she's hers. That's *my* ground, that's *my* love, that's *my* faith." She caught Effie up again; she held her in two strong arms and dealt her a kiss that was a long consecration. "It's as your dear dead mother's, my own, my sweet, that—if it's time—I shall carry you to bed!" She passed swiftly down the slope with her burden and took the turn which led her out of sight. Jean stood watching her till she disappeared and then waited till she had emerged for the usual minute on the rise in the middle of the bridge. She saw her stop again there, she saw her again,

as if in the triumph—a great open-air insolence—of possession, press her face to the little girl's. Then they dipped together to the further end and were lost, and Jean, after taking a few vague steps on the lawn, paused, as if sick with the aftertaste of her encounter, and turned to the nearest seat. It was close to Mrs. Beever's blighted tea-table, and when she had sunk into the chair she threw her arms upon this support and wearily dropped her head.

XXVI

At the end of some minutes, with the sense of being approached, she looked up and saw Paul Beever. Returning to the garden, he had stopped short at sight of her, and his arrival made her spring to her feet with the fear of having, in the belief that she was unobserved, shown him something she had never shown. But as he bent upon her his kind, ugly face there came into her own the comfort of a general admission, the drop of all attempt at a superfine surface: they stood together without saying a word, and there passed between them something sad and clear, something that was in its essence a recognition of the great, pleasant oddity of their being drawn closer by their rupture. They knew everything about each other now and, young and clean and good as they were, could meet not only without attenuations, but with a positive friendliness that was for each, from the other, a

moral help. Paul had no need of speech to show Jean how he thanked her for understanding why he had not besieged her with a pressure more heroic, and she, on her side, could enter with the tread of a nurse in a sick-room into the spirit of that accommodation. They both, moreover, had been closeted with his mother—an experience on which they could, with some dumb humour, compare notes. The girl, finally, had now, to this dear boy she didn't love, something more to give than she had ever given; and after a little she could see the dawn of suspicion of it in the eyes with which he searched her grave face.

"I knew Miss Armiger had come back here, and I thought I should find her," he presently explained.

"She was here a few minutes ago—she has just left me," Jean said.

"To go in again?" Paul appeared to wonder he had not met her on his way out.

"To go over to Bounds."

He continued to wonder. "With Mr. Bream?"

"No—with his little girl."

Paul's surprise increased. "She has taken *her* up?"

Jean hesitated ; she uneasily laughed. "Up—up—up : away up in her arms !"

Her companion was more literal. "A young woman of Effie's age must be a weight !"

"I know what weight—I've carried her. Miss Armiger did it precisely to prevent that."

"To prevent your carrying her ?"

"To prevent my touching or, if possible, looking at her. She snatched her up and fled with her—to get her away from me."

"Why should she wish to do that ?" Paul inquired.

"I think you had better ask her directly." Then Jean added : "As you say, she has taken her up. She's *her* occupation, from this time."

"Why, suddenly, from this time ?"

"Because of what has happened."

"Between you and me ?"

"Yes—that's one of her reasons."

"One of them ?" laughed Paul. "She has so many ?"

"She tells me she has two."

"Two ? She speaks of it ?"

Jean saw, visibly, that she mystified him ; but she

as visibly tried to let him see that this was partly because she spared him. "She speaks of it with perfect frankness."

"Then what's her second reason?"

"That if I'm not engaged"—Jean hung fire, but she brought it out—"at least she herself is."

"She herself?—instead of you?"

Paul's blandness was so utter that his companion's sense of the comic was this time, and in spite of the cruelty involved in a correction, really touched. "To you? No, not to you, my dear Paul. To a gentleman I found with her here. To that Mr. Vidal," said Jean.

Paul gasped. "You found that Mr. Vidal with her?" He looked bewilderedly about. "Where then *is* he?"

"He went over to Bounds."

"And she went with him?"

"No, she went after."

Still Paul stood staring. "Where the dickens did he drop from?"

"I haven't the least idea."

The young man had a sudden light. "Why, I saw him with mamma! He was here when I came off the river—he borrowed the boat."

"But you didn't know it was he?"

"I never dreamed—and mamma never told me."

Jean thought a moment. "She was afraid. You see I'm not."

Paul Beaver more pitifully wondered; he repeated again the word she had left ringing in his ears. "She's 'engaged'?"

"So she informed me."

His little eyes rested on her with a stupefaction so candid as almost to amount to a challenge; then they moved away, far away, and he stood lost in what he felt. She came, tenderly, nearer to him, and they turned back to her; on which he saw they were filled with the tears that another failure she knew of had no power to draw to them. "It's awfully odd!" he said.

"I've had to hurt you," she replied. "I'm very sorry for you."

"Oh, don't mind it!" Paul smiled.

"These are things for you to hear of—straight."

"From *her*? Ah, I don't want to do that! You see, of course, I shan't say anything." And he covered, for an instant, working it clumsily, one of his little eyes with the base of one of his big thumbs.

Jean held out her hand to him. "Do you love her?"

He took it, embarrassed, without meeting her look; then, suddenly, something of importance seemed to occur to him and he replied with simple alertness: "I never mentioned it!"

Dimly, but ever so kindly, Jean smiled. "Because you hadn't had your talk with *me*?" She kept hold of his hand. "Dear Paul, I must say it again—you're beautiful!"

He stared, not as yet taking this approval home; then with the same prompt veracity, "But she knows it, you know, all the same!" he exclaimed.

Jean laughed as she released him; but it kept no gravity out of the tone in which she presently repeated: "I'm sorry for you."

"Oh, it's all right! May I light a cigarette?" he asked.

"As many as you like. But I must leave you."

He had struck a match, and at this he paused. "Because I'm smoking?"

"Dear, no. Because I must go over to see Effie." Facing wistfully to her little friend's quarter, Jean thought aloud. "I always bid her

'Good-night.' I don't see why—on her birthday, of all evenings—I should omit it."

"Well, then, bid her 'Good-night' for me too." She was halfway down the slope; Paul went in the same direction, puffing his cigarette hard. Then, stopping short, "Tony puts him up?" he abruptly asked.

"Mr. Vidal? So it appears."

He gazed a little, blowing his smoke, at this appearance. "And she has gone over to see him?"

"That may be a part of her errand."

He hesitated again. "They can't have lost much time!"

"Very little indeed."

Jean went on again; but again he checked her with a question. "What has he, what has the matter you speak of, to do with her cutting in——?" He paused as if in the presence of things painfully obscure.

"To the interest others take in the child? Ah," said Jean, "if you feel as you do"—she hesitated—"don't ask me. Ask her!"

She went her way, and, standing there in thought,

he waited for her to come, after an interval, into sight on the curve of the bridge. Then as the minutes elapsed without her doing so, he lounged, heavy and blank, up again to where he had found her. Manning, while his back was turned, had arrived with one of her aids to carry off the tea-things ; and from a distance, planted on the lawn, he bent on these evolutions an attention unnaturally fixed. The women marched and countermarched, dismantling the table ; he broodingly and vacantly watched them ; then, as he lighted a fresh cigarette, he saw his mother come out of the house to give an eye to their work. She reached the spot and dropped a command or two ; after which, joining him, she took in that her little company had dispersed.

“What has become of every one ? ”

Paul's replies were slow ; but he gave her one now that was distinct. “After the talk on which I lately left you I should think you would know pretty well what had become of *me*.”

She gave him a keen look ; her face softened.

“What on earth's the matter with you ? ”

He placidly smoked. “I've had my head punched.”

"Nonsense—for all you mind me!" She scanned him again. "Are you ill, Paul?"

"I'm all right," he answered philosophically.

"Then kiss your old mammy." Solemnly, silently he obeyed her; but after he had done so she still held him before her eyes. She gave him a sharp pat. "You're worth them all!"

Paul made no acknowledgment of this tribute save to remark after an instant rather awkwardly: "I don't know where Tony is."

"I can do without Tony," said his mother. "But where's Tony's child?"

"Miss Armiger has taken her home."

"The clever thing!"—Mrs. Beever fairly applauded the feat. "She was here when you came out?"

"No, but Jean told me."

"Jean was here?"

"Yes; but she went over."

"Over to Bounds—after what has happened?" Mrs. Beever looked at first incredulous; then she looked stern again. "What in the name of goodness possesses her?"

"The wish to bid Effie good-night."

Mrs. Beever was silent a moment. "I wish to heaven she'd leave Effie alone!"

"Aren't there different ways of looking at that?"

Paul indulgently asked.

"Plenty, no doubt—and only one decent one." The grossness of the girl's error seemed to loom larger. "I'm ashamed of her!" she declared.

"Well, I'm not!" Paul quietly returned.

"Oh, you—of course you excuse her!" In the agitation that he had produced Mrs. Beever bounced across an interval that brought her into view of an object from which, as she stopped short at the sight of it, her emotion drew fresh sustenance. "Why, there's the boat!"

"Mr. Vidal has brought it back," said Paul.

She faced round in surprise. "You've seen him?"

"No, but Jean told me."

The lady of Eastmead stared. "*She* has seen him? Then where on earth is he?"

"He's staying at Bounds," said Paul.

His mother's wonderment deepened. "He has got there already?"

Paul smoked a little: then he explained. "It's

not very soon for Mr. Vidal—he puts things through. He's already engaged to her."

Mystified, at sea, Mrs. Beever dropped upon a bench. "Engaged to Jean?"

"Engaged to Miss Armiger."

She tossed her head with impatience. "What news is that? He was engaged to her five years ago!"

"Well, then he is still. They've patched it up."

Mrs. Beever was on her feet. "She has seen him?"

Tony Bream at this moment came rapidly down the lawn and had the effect of staying Paul's answer. The young man gave a jerk to the stump of his cigarette and turned away with marked nervousness.

XXVII

THE lady of Eastmead fronted her neighbour with a certain grimness. "She has seen him—they've patched it up."

Breathless with curiosity, Tony yet made but a bite of her news. "It's on again—it's all right?"

"It's whatever you like to call it. I only know what Paul tells me."

Paul, at this, stopped in his slow retreat, wheeling about. "I only know what I had just now from Jean."

Tony's expression, in the presence of his young friend's, dropped almost comically into the considerate. "Oh, but I daresay it's so, old man. I was there when they met," he explained to Mrs. Beever, "and I saw for myself pretty well how it would go."

"I confess I didn't," she replied. Then she added: "It must have gone with a jump!"

"With a jump, precisely—and the jump was hers!" laughed Tony. "All's well that ends well!" He was heated—he wiped his excited brow, and Mrs. Beever looked at him as if it struck her that she had helped him to more emotion than she wished him. "She's a most extraordinary girl," he went on, "and the effort she made there, all unprepared for it"—he nodded at the very spot of the exploit—"was magnificent in its way, one of the finest things I've ever seen." His appreciation of the results of this effort seemed almost feverish, and his elation deepened so that he turned, rather blindly, to poor Paul. "Upon my honour she's cleverer, she has more domestic resources, as one may say, than—I don't care whom!"

"Oh, we all know how clever she is!" Mrs. Beever impatiently grunted.

Tony's enthusiasm, none the less, overflowed; he was nervous for joy. "I thought I did myself, but she had a lot more to show me!" He addressed himself again to Paul. "She told you—with her coolness?"

Paul was occupied with another cigarette; he emitted no sound, and his mother, with a glance at

him, spoke for him. "Didn't you hear him say it was Jean who told him?"

"Oh, Jean!"—Tony looked graver. "She told Jean?" But his gaiety, at this image, quickly came back. "That was charming of her!"

Mrs. Beever remained cold. "Why on earth was it charming?"

Tony, though he reddened, was pulled up but an instant—his spirits carried him on. "Oh, because there hasn't been much between them, and it was a pretty mark of confidence." He glanced at his watch. "They're in the house?"

"Not in mine—in yours."

Tony looked surprised. "Rose and Vidal?"

Paul spoke at last. "Jean also went over—went after them."

Tony thought a moment. "'After them'—Jean? How long ago?"

"About a quarter of an hour," said Paul.

Tony continued to wonder. "Aren't you mistaken? They're not there now."

"How do you know," asked Mrs. Beever, "if you've not been home?"

"I *have* been home—I was there five minutes ago."

"Then how did you get here——?"

"By the long way? I took a fly. I went back to get a paper I had stupidly forgotten and that I needed for a fellow with whom I had to talk. Our talk was a bore for the want of it, so I drove over there and got it, and, as he had his train to catch, I then overtook him at the station. I ran it close, but I saw him off; and here I am." Tony shook his head. "There's no one at Bounds."

Mrs. Beever looked at Paul. "Then where's Effie?"

"Effie's not here?" Tony asked.

"Miss Armiger took her home," said Paul.

"You saw them go?"

"No, but Jean told me."

"Then where's Miss Armiger?" Tony continued.

"And where's Jean herself?"

"Where's Effie herself—that's the question," said Mrs. Beever.

"No," Tony laughed, "the question's Where's Vidal? *He's* the fellow I want to catch. I asked him to stay with me, and he said he'd go over, and it was my finding just now he hadn't come over that made me drive on here from the station to pick him up."

Mrs. Beever gave ear to this statement, but she gave nothing else. "Mr. Vidal can take care of himself; but if Effie's not at home, where is she?" She pressed her son. "Are you sure of what Jean said to you?"

Paul bethought himself. "Perfectly, mamma. She said Miss Armiger carried off the little girl."

Tony appeared struck with this. "That's exactly what Rose told me she meant to do. Then they're simply in the garden—they simply hadn't come in."

"They've been in gardens enough!" Mrs. Beever declared. "I should like to know the child's simply in bed."

"So should I," said Tony with an irritation that was just perceptible; "but I none the less deprecate the time-honoured custom of a flurry—I may say indeed of a panic—whenever she's for a moment out of sight." He spoke almost as if Mrs. Beever were trying to spoil for him by the note of anxiety the pleasantness of the news about Rose. The next moment, however, he questioned Paul with an evident return of the sense that toward a young man to whom

such a hope was lost it was a time for special tact.

"You, at any rate, dear boy, saw Jean go?"

"Oh, yes—I saw Jean go."

"And you understood from her that Rose and Effie went with Vidal?"

Paul consulted his memory. "I think Mr. Vidal went first."

Tony thought a moment. "Thanks so much, old chap." Then with an exaggerated gaiety that might have struck his companions had it not been the sign of so much of his conversation: "They're all a jolly party in the garden together. I'll go over."

Mrs. Beever had been watching the bridge. "Here comes Rose—she'll tell us."

Tony looked, but their friend had already dropped on the hither side, and he turned to Paul. "You wouldn't object—a—to dining——?"

"To meet Mr. Vidal?" Mrs. Beever interposed. "Poor Paul," she laughed, "you're between two fires! You and your guest," she said to her neighbour, "had better dine here."

"Both fires at once?"—Tony smiled at her son. "Should you like that better?"

Paul, where he stood, was lost in the act of

watching for Rose. He shook his head absently. "I don't care a rap!" Then he turned away again, and his mother, addressing Tony, dropped her voice.

"He won't show."

"Do you mean his feelings?"

"I mean for either of us."

Tony observed him a moment. "Poor lad, I'll bring him round!" After which, "Do you mind if I speak to her of it?" he abruptly inquired.

"To Rose—of this news?" Mrs. Beever looked at him hard, and it led her to reply with severity: "Tony Bream, I don't know what to make of you!" She was apparently on the point of making something rather bad, but she now saw Rose at the bottom of the slope and straightway hailed her. "You took Effie home?"

Rose came quickly up. "Not I! She isn't here?"

"She's gone," said Mrs. Beever. "Where is she?"

"I'm afraid I don't know. I gave her up." Paul had wheeled round at her first negation; Tony had not moved. Bright and handsome, but a little out of breath, she looked from one of her friends to the

other. "You're sure she's not here?" Her surprise was fine.

Mrs. Beever's, however, had greater freedom. "How can she be, when Jean says you took her away?"

Rose Armiger stared; she threw back her head. "'Jean says?'" She looked round her. "Where is 'Jean'?"

"She's nowhere about—she's not in the house." Mrs. Beever challenged the two men, echoing the question as if it were indeed pertinent. "Where is the girl?"

"She has gone to Bounds," said Tony. "She's not in my garden?"

"She wasn't five minutes ago—I've just come out of it."

"Then what took you there?" asked Mrs. Beever.

"Mr. Vidal." Rose smiled at Tony: "*You* know what!" She turned again to Mrs. Beever, looking her full in the face. "I've seen him. I went over with him."

"Leaving Effie with Jean—precisely," said Tony, in his arranging way.

"She came out—she begged so hard," Rose explained to Mrs. Beever. "So I gave in."

"And yet Jean says the contrary?" this lady demanded in stupefaction of her son.

Rose turned, incredulous, to Paul. "She said to *you*—anything so false?"

"My dear boy, you simply didn't understand!" Tony laughed. "Give me a cigarette."

Paul's eyes, contracted to the pin-points we have already seen them become in his moments of emotion, had been attached, while he smoked still harder, to Rose's face. He turned very red and, before answering her, held out his cigarette-case. "That was what I remember she said—that you had gone with Effie to Bounds."

Rose stood wonderstruck. "When she had taken her from me herself——?"

Mrs. Beever referred her to Paul. "But she wasn't with Jean when he saw her!"

Rose appealed to him. "You saw Miss Martle alone?"

"Oh yes, quite alone." Paul now was crimson and without visible sight.

"My dear boy," cried Tony, impatient, "you simply *don't* remember."

"Yes, Tony. I remember."

Rose had turned grave—she gave Paul a sombre stare. “Then what on earth had she done with her?”

“What she had done was evident: she had taken her home!” Tony declared with an air of incipient disgust. They made a silly mystery of nothing.

Rose gave him a quick, strained smile. “But if the child’s not there——?”

“You just told us yourself she isn’t!” Mrs. Beever reminded him.

He hunched his shoulders as if there might be many explanations. “Then she’s somewhere else. She’s wherever Jean took her.”

“But if Jean was here without her?”

“Then Jean, my dear lady, had come back.”

“Come back to lie?” asked Mrs. Beever.

Tony coloured at this, but he controlled himself. “Dearest Mrs. Beever, Jean doesn’t lie.”

“Then somebody does!” Mrs. Beever roundly brought out.

“It’s not you, Mr. Paul, I know!” Rose declared, discomposed but still smiling. “Was it you who saw her go over?”

“Yes; she left me here.”

"How long ago?"

Paul looked as if fifty persons had been watching him. "Oh, not long!"

Rose addressed herself to the trio. "Then why on earth haven't I met her? She must explain her astounding statement!"

"You'll see that she'll explain it easily," said Tony.

"Ah, but, meanwhile, where's your daughter, don't you know?" Rose demanded with resentment.

"I'm just going over to see."

"Then please go!" she replied with a nervous laugh. She presented to the others, as a criticism of his inaction, a white, uneasy face.

"I want first," said Tony, "to express to you my real joy. Please believe in it."

She thought—she seemed to come back from a distance. "Oh, you know?" Then to Paul: "She told you? It's a detail," she added impatiently. "*The question*"—she thought again—"is the poor child." Once more she appealed to Paul. "Will you go and see?"

"Yes, go, boy." Tony patted his back.

"Go this moment," his mother put in.

He none the less lingered long enough to offer Rose his blind face. "I want also to express——"

She took him up with a wonderful laugh. "*Your* real joy, dear Mr. Paul?"

"Please believe in that too." And Paul, at an unwonted pace, took his way.

"I believe in everything—I believe in every one," Rose went on. "But I don't believe——" She hesitated, then checked herself. "No matter. Can you forgive me?" she asked of Mrs. Beever.

"For giving up the child?" The lady of Eastmead looked at her hard. "No!" she said curtly, and, turning straight away, went and dropped into a seat from which she watched the retreating figures of her two parlourmaids, who carried off between them a basket containing the paraphernalia of tea. Rose, with a queer expression, but with her straight back to the painful past, quietly transferred her plea to Tony. "It was his coming—it made the difference. It upset me."

"Upset you? You were splendid!"

The light of what had happened was in her face as she considered him. "*You* are!" she replied.

Then she added: "But he's finer than either of us!"

"I told you four years ago what he is. He's all right."

"Yes," said Rose—"he's all right. And *I* am—now," she went on. "You've been good to me." She put out her hand. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye? You're going?"

"He takes me away."

"But not to-night!"—Tony's native kindness, expressed in his inflection, felt that it could now risk almost all the forms he essentially liked.

From the depth of Rose's eyes peeped a distracted, ironic sense of this. But she said with all quietude: "To-morrow early. I may not see you."

"Don't be absurd!" laughed Tony.

"Ah, well—if you will!" She stood a moment looking down; then raising her eyes, "Don't hold my hand so long," she abruptly said. "Mrs. Beever, who has dismissed the servants, is watching us."

Tony had the appearance of having felt as if he had let it go; but at this, after a glance at the person indicated, staring and smiling with a clear face, he retained his grasp of it. "How in the

world, with your back turned, can you see that ? ”

“ It’s with my back turned that I see most. She’s looking at us hard.”

“ I don’t care a hang ! ” said Tony gaily.

“ Oh, I don’t say it for myself ! ” But Rose withdrew her hand.

Tony put both his own into his pockets. “ I hope you’ll let me say to you—very simply—that I believe you’ll be very happy.”

“ I shall be as happy as a woman can be who has abandoned her post.”

“ Oh, your post ! ”—Tony made a joke of that now. But he instantly added : “ Your post will be to honour us with your company at Bounds again ; which, as a married woman, you see, you’ll be perfectly able to do.”

She smiled at him. “ How you arrange things ! ” Then with a musing headshake : “ We leave England.”

“ How *you* arrange them ! ” Tony exclaimed. “ He goes back to China ? ”

“ Very soon—he’s doing so well.”

Tony hesitated. “ I hope he has made money.”

"A great deal. I should look better—shouldn't I?—if he hadn't. But I show you enough how little I care how I look. I blow hot and cold; I'm all there—then I'm off. No matter," she repeated. In a moment she added: "I accept your hopes for my happiness. It will do, no doubt, soon as I learn——!" Her voice dropped for impatience; she turned to the quarter of the approach from the other house.

"That Effie's all right?" Tony saw their messenger already in the shrubbery. "Here comes Paul to tell us."

Mrs. Beever rejoined them as he spoke. "It wasn't Paul on the bridge. It was the Doctor—without his hat."

"Without his hat?" Rose murmured.

"He has it in his hand," Tony cheerfully asserted as their good friend emerged from cover.

But he hadn't it in his hand, and at sight of them on the top of the slope he stopped short, stopped long enough to give Rose time to call eagerly: "Is Effie there?"

It was long enough also to give them all time to see, across the space, that his hair was disordered

and his look at them strange ; but they had no sooner done so than he made a violent gesture—a motion to check the downward rush that he evidently felt his aspect would provoke. It was so imperative that, coming up, he was with them before they had moved, showing them splashed, wet clothes and a little hard white face that Wilverley had never seen. “There has been an accident.” Neither had Wilverley, gathered into three pair of ears, heard that voice.

The first effect of these things was to hold it an instant while Tony cried : “She’s hurt ?”

“She’s killed ?” cried Mrs. Beever.

“Stay where you are !” was the Doctor’s stern response. Tony had given a bound, but, caught by the arm, found himself jerked, flaming red, face to face with Rose, who had been caught as tightly by the wrist. The Doctor closed his eyes for a second with this effort of restraint, but in the force he had put into it, which was not all of the hands, his captives submissively quivered. “You’re not to go !” he declared—quite as if it were for their own good.

“She’s dead ?” Tony panted.

“Who’s *with* her—who *was* ?” cried Rose.

“Paul’s with her—by the water.”

"By the water?" Rose shrieked.

"My child's *drowned*?"—Tony's cry was strange.

The Doctor had been looking from one of them to the other; then he looked at Mrs. Beaver, who, instantly, admirably, with a strength quickly acknowledged by the mute motion of his expressive little chin toward her, had stilled herself into the appeal of a blanched, breathless wait. "May *I* go?" sovereignly came from her.

"Go. There's no one else," he said as she bounced down the bank.

"No one else? Then where's that girl?"—Rose's question was fierce. She gave, as fiercely, to free herself, a great wrench of her arm, but the Doctor held her as if still to spare her what he himself had too dreadfully seen. He looked at Tony, who said with quick quietness—

"Ramage, have I lost my child?"

"You'll see—be brave. Not *yet*—I've told Paul. Be quiet!" the Doctor repeated; then his hand dropped on feeling that the movement he had meant to check in his friend was the vibration of a man stricken to weakness and sickened on the spot. Tony's face had turned black; he was rooted to the

ground ; he stared at Rose, to whom the Doctor said :

"Who, Miss Armiger, was with her?"

All her lividness wondered. "When *was* it——?"

"God knows! She was there—against the bridge."

"Against the bridge—where I passed just now? I saw nothing!" Rose jerked, while Tony dumbly closed his eyes.

"I came over because she wasn't at the house, and—from the bank—*there* she was. I reached her—with the boat, with a push. She might have been half an hour——"

"It was half an hour ago she took her!" Rose broke in. "She's not there?"

The Doctor looked at her hard. "Of whom do you speak?"

"Why, of Miss Martle—whose hands are never off her." Rose's mask was the mask of Medusa.

"What has become of Miss Martle?"

Dr. Ramage turned with the question to Tony, whose eyes, open now, were half out of his head.

"What has become of her?"

"She's not there?" Tony articulated.

"There's no one there."

"Not Dennis?" sprang bewilderedly from Rose.

The Doctor stared. "Mr. Vidal? No, thank God—only Paul." Then pressing Tony: "Miss Martle was with her?"

Tony's eyes rolled over all space. "No—not Miss Martle."

"But *somebody* was!" Rose clamoured. "She wasn't alone!"

Tony fixed her an instant. "Not Miss Martle," he repeated.

"But who then? And where is she now?"

"It's positive she's not here?" the Doctor asked of Rose.

"Positive—Mrs. Beever knew. Where *is* she?" Rose rang out.

"Where in the name——?" passed, as with the dawn of a deeper horror, from their companion to Tony.

Tony's eyes sounded Rose's, and hers blazed back. His silence was an anguish, his face a convulsion. "It isn't half an hour," he at last brought out.

"Since it happened?" The Doctor blinked at his sudden knowledge. "Then when——?"

Tony looked at him straight. "When I was there."

"And when was that?"

"After I called for you."

"To leave word for me to go?" The Doctor set his face. "But you were not going home then."

"I did go—I had a reason. You know it," Tony said to Rose.

"When you went for your paper?" She thought. "But Effie wasn't there then."

"Why not? She was there, but Miss Martle wasn't with her."

"Then, in God's name, who was?" cried the Doctor.

"*I was*," said Tony.

Rose gave the inarticulate cry of a person who has been holding her breath, and the Doctor an equally loud, but more stupefied "You?"

Tony fixed upon Rose a gaze that seemed to count her respirations. "I was with her," he repeated; "and I was with her alone. And what was done—I did." He paused while they both gasped: then he looked at the Doctor. "Now you know." They continued to gasp; his confession was a blinding glare, in the shock of which the Doctor staggered back from Rose and she fell away with a

liberated spring. "God forgive me!" howled Tony—he broke now into a storm of sobs. He dropped upon a bench with his wretched face in his hands, while Rose, with a passionate wail, threw herself, appalled, on the grass, and their companion, in a colder dismay, looked from one prostrate figure to the other.

END OF BOOK SECOND

BOOK THIRD

XXVIII

THE greatest of the parlourmaids came from the hall into the drawing-room at Eastmead—the high, square temple of mahogany and tapestry in which, the last few years, Mrs. Beever had spent much time in rejoicing that she had never set up new gods. She had left it, from the first, as it was—full of the old things that, on succeeding to her husband's mother, she had been obliged, as a young woman of that period, to accept as dolefully different from the things thought beautiful by other young women whose views of drawing-rooms, all about her, had also been intensified by marriage. She had not unassistedly discovered the beauty of her heritage, and she had not from any such subtle suspicion kept her hands off it. She had never in her life taken any course with regard to any object for reasons that had so little to do with her duty. Everything in her house stood, at an angle of its

own, on the solid rock of the discipline it had cost her. She had therefore lived with mere dry wistfulness through the age of rosewood, and had been rewarded by finding that, like those who sit still in runaway vehicles, she was the only person not thrown out. Her mahogany had never moved, but the way people talked about it had, and the people who talked were now eager to sit down with her on everything that both she and they had anciently thought plainest and poorest. It was Jean, above all, who had opened her eyes—opened them in particular to the great wine-dark doors, polished and silver-hinged, with which the lady of Eastmead, arriving at the depressed formula that they were “gloomy,” had for thirty years, prudently on the whole, as she considered, shut out the question of taste. One of these doors Manning now softly closed, standing, however, with her hand on the knob and looking across, as if, in the stillness, to listen at another which exactly balanced with it on the opposite side of the room. The light of the long day had not wholly faded, but what remained of it was the glow of the western sky, which showed through the wide, high window that was still open

to the garden. The sensible hush in which Manning waited was broken after a moment by a movement, ever so gentle, of the other door. Mrs. Beever put her head out of the next room ; then, seeing her servant, closed the door with precautions and came forward. Her face, hard but overcharged, had pressingly asked a question.

"Yes, ma'am—Mr. Vidal. I showed him, as you told me, into the library."

Mrs. Beever thought. "It may be wanted. I'll see him here." But she checked the woman's retreat. "Mr. Beever's in his room?"

"No, ma'am—he went out."

"But a minute ago?"

"Longer, ma'am. After he carried in——"

Mrs. Beever stayed the phrase on Manning's lips and quickly supplied her own. "The dear little girl—yes. He went to Mr. Bream?"

"No, ma'am—the other way."

Mrs. Beever thought afresh. "But Miss Armiger's in?"

"Oh, yes—in her room."

"She went straight?"

Manning, on her side, reflected. "Yes, ma'am. She always goes straight."

"Not always," said Mrs. Beever. "But she's quiet there?"

"Very quiet."

"Then call Mr. Vidal." While Manning obeyed she turned to the window and stared at the gathering dusk. Then the door that had been left open closed again, and she faced about to Dennis Vidal.

"Something dreadful has happened?" he instantly asked.

"Something dreadful has happened. You've come from Bounds?"

"As fast as I could run. I saw Doctor Ramage there."

"And what did he tell you?"

"That I must come straight here."

"Nothing else?"

"That you would tell me," Dennis said. "I saw the shock in his face."

"But you didn't ask?"

"Nothing. Here I am."

"Here you are, thank God!" Mrs. Beever gave a muffled moan.

She was going on, but, eagerly, he went before her. "Can I help you?"

"Yes—if there *is* help. You can do so first by not asking me a question till I have put those I wish to yourself."

"Put them—put them!" he said impatiently.

At his peremptory note she quivered, showing him she was in the state in which every sound startles. She locked her lips and closed her eyes an instant; she held herself together with an effort. "I'm in great trouble, and I venture to believe that if you came back to me to-day it was because——"

He took her up shorter than before. "Because I thought of you as a friend? For God's sake, think of *me* as one!"

She pressed to her lips while she looked at him the small tight knot into which her nerves had crumpled her pocket-handkerchief. She had no tears—only a visible terror. "I've never appealed to one," she replied, "as I shall appeal to you now. Effie Bream is dead." Then an instant horror was in his eyes: "She was found in the water."

"The water?" Dennis gasped.

"Under the bridge—at the other side. She had

been caught, she was held, in the slow current by some obstruction, and by the pier. Don't ask me *how*—when I arrived, by the mercy of heaven, she had been brought to the bank. But she was gone." With a movement of the head toward the room she had quitted, "We carried her back here," she went on. Vidal's face, which was terrible in the intensity of its sudden vision, struck her apparently as for the instant an echo, wild but interrogative, of what she had last said ; so she explained quickly : "To think—to get more time." He turned straight away from her ; he went, as she had done, to the window and, with his back presented, stood looking out in the mere rigour of dismay.

She was silent long enough to show a respect for the particular consternation that her manner of watching him betrayed her impression of having stirred ; then she went on : "How long were you at Bounds with Rose ?"

Dennis turned round without meeting her eyes or, at first, understanding her question. "At Bounds ?"

"When, on your joining her, she went over with you."

He thought a moment. "She didn't go over with me. I went alone—after the child came out."

"You were there when Manning brought her?"
—Mrs. Beever wondered. "Manning didn't tell me that."

"I found Rose on the lawn—with Mr. Bream—when I brought back your boat. He left us together—after inviting me to Bounds—and then the little girl arrived. Rose let me hold her, and I was with them till Miss Martle appeared. Then I—rather uncivilly—went off."

"You went without Rose?" Mrs. Beever asked.

"Yes—I left her with the little girl and Miss Martle." The marked effect of this statement made him add: "Was it your impression I didn't?"

His companion, before answering him, dropped into a seat and stared up at him; after which she articulated: "I'll tell you later. You left them," she demanded, "in the garden with the child?"

"In the garden with the child."

"Then you hadn't taken her?"

Dennis had for some seconds a failure either of memory or of courage; but whichever it was he

completely overcame it. "By no means. She was in Rose's arms."

Mrs. Beever, at this image, lowered her eyes to the floor; after which, raising them again, she continued: "You went to Bounds?"

"No—I turned off short. I *was* going, but if I had a great deal to think of," Dennis pursued, "after I had learned from you she was here, the quantity wasn't of course diminished by our personal encounter." He hesitated. "I had seen her with *him*."

"Well?" said Mrs. Beever as he paused again.

"I asked you if she was in love with him."

"And I bade you find out for yourself."

"I've found out," Dennis said.

"Well?" Mrs. Beever repeated.

It was evidently, even in this tighter tension, something of an ease to all his soreness to tell her. "I've never seen anything like it—and there's not much I've not seen."

"That's exactly what the Doctor says!"

Dennis stared, but after a moment, "And does the Doctor say Mr. Bream cares?" he somewhat artlessly inquired.

"Not a farthing."

"Not a farthing. I'm bound to say—I could see it for myself," he declared, "that he has behaved very well." Mrs. Beever, at this, turning in torment on her seat, gave a smothered wail which pulled him up so that he went on in surprise: "Don't you think that?"

"I'll tell you later," she answered. "In the presence of this misery I don't judge him.

"No more do I. But what I was going to say was that, all the same, the way he has with a woman, the way he had with *her* there, and his damned good looks and his great happiness——"

"His great happiness? God help him!" Mrs. Beever broke out, springing up again in her emotion. She stood before him with pleading hands. "Where *were* you then?"

"After I left the garden? I was upset, I was dissatisfied—I didn't go over. I lighted a cigar; I passed out of the gate by your little closed pavilion and kept on by the river."

"By the river?"—Mrs. Beever was blank. "Then why didn't you see——?"

"What happened to the child? Because if it

happened near the bridge I had left the bridge behind."

"But you were in sight——"

"For five minutes," Dennis said. "I was in sight perhaps even for ten. I strolled there, I turned things over, I watched the stream and, finally—just at the sharp bend—I sat a little on the stile beyond that smart new boat-house."

"It's a horrid thing." Mrs. Beever considered. "But you see the bridge from the boat-house."

Dennis hesitated. "Yes—it's a good way, but you've a glimpse."

"Which showed you nothing at all?"

"Nothing at all?"—his echo of the question was interrogative, and it carried him uneasily to the window, where he again, for a little, stared out. The pink of the sky had faded and dusk had begun in the room. At last he faced about. "No—I saw something. But I'll not tell you what it was, please, till I've myself asked you a thing or two."

Mrs. Beever was silent at this: they stood face to face in the twilight. Then she slowly exhaled a throb of her anguish. "I think you'll be a help."

"How much of one," he bitterly demanded,

"shall I be to myself?" But he continued before she could meet the question: "I went back to the bridge, and as I approached it Miss Martle came down to it from your garden."

Mrs. Beever grabbed his arm. "Without the child?" He was silent so long that she repeated it: "Without the child?"

He finally spoke. "Without the child."

She looked at him as she showed that she felt she had never looked at any man. "On your sacred honour?"

"On my sacred honour."

She closed her eyes as she had closed them at the beginning of their talk, and the same defeated spasm passed over her face. "You *are* a help," she said.

"Well," Dennis replied straightforwardly, "if it's being one to let you know that she was with me from that moment——"

Breathless she caught him up. "With *you*?—till when?"

"Till just now, when we again separated at the gate-house: I to go over to Bounds, as I had promised Mr. Bream, and Miss Martle——"

Again she snatched the words from him. "To come straight in? Oh, glory be to God!"

Dennis showed some bewilderment. "She *did* come——?"

"Mercy, yes—to meet this horror. She's with Effie." She returned to it, to have it again. "She was *with* you?"

"A quarter of an hour—perhaps more." At this Mrs. Beever dropped upon her sofa again and gave herself to the tears that had not sooner come. She sobbed softly, controlling them, and Dennis watched her with hard, haggard pity; after which he said: "As soon as I saw her I spoke to her—I felt that I wanted her."

"You wanted her?"—in the clearer medium through which Mrs. Beever now could look up there were still obscurities.

He hesitated. "For what she might say to me. I told you, when we spoke of Rose after my arrival, that I had not come to watch her. But while I was with them"—he jerked his head at the garden—"something remarkable took place."

Mrs. Beever rose again. "I know what took place."

He seemed struck. "You know it?"

"She told Jean."

Dennis stared. "I think not."

"Jean didn't speak of it to you?"

"Not a word."

"She spoke of it to Paul," said Mrs. Beever. Then, to be more specific: "Something highly remarkable. I mean your engagement."

Dennis was mute; but at last, in the gathered gloom, his voice was stranger than his silence.

"My engagement?"

"Didn't you, on the spot, induce her to renew it?"

Again, for some time, he was dumb. "Has she said so?" he then asked.

"To every one."

Once more he waited. "I should like to see her."

"Here she is."

• The door from the hall had opened as he spoke: Rose Armiger stood there. She addressed him straight and as if she had not seen Mrs. Beever. "I knew you'd be here—I must see you."

Mrs. Beever passed quickly to the side of the

room at which she had entered, where her fifty years of order abruptly came out to Dennis. "Will you have lights?"

It was Rose who replied. "No lights, thanks." But she stayed her hostess. "May I see her?"

Mrs. Beever fixed a look through the dusk. "No!" And she slipped soundlessly away.

XXIX

ROSE had come for a purpose, Vidal saw, to which she would make but a bound, and she seemed in fact to take the spring as she instantly broke out : "For what did you come back to me ?—for what did you come back ?" She approached him quickly, but he made, more quickly, a move that gained him space and that might well have been the result of two sharp impressions : one of these the sense that in a single hour she had so altered as to be ugly, without a trace of the charm that had haunted him ; and the other the sense that, thus ravaged and disfigured, wrecked in the gust that had come and gone, she required of him something that she had never required. A monstrous reality flared up in their relation, the perception of which was a shock that he was conscious for the moment of betraying that he feared, finding no words to answer her and showing her, across the room, while she repeated

her question, a face blanched by the change in her own. "For what did you come back to me?—for what did you come back?"

He gaped at her; then as if there were help for him in the simple fact that on his own side he could immediately recall, he stammered out: "To you—to you? I hadn't the slightest notion you were here!"

"Didn't you come to see where I was? Didn't you come absolutely and publicly *for* me?" He jerked round again to the window with the vague, wild gesture of a man in horrible pain, and she went on without vehemence, but with clear, deep intensity: "It was exactly when you found I was here that you did come back. You had a perfect chance, on learning it, not to show; but you didn't take the chance, you quickly put it aside. You reflected, you decided, you insisted we should meet." Her voice, as if in harmony with the power of her plea, dropped to a vibration more muffled, a soft but inexorable pressure. "I hadn't called you, I hadn't troubled you, I left you as perfectly alone as I've *been* alone. It was your own passion and your own act—you've dropped upon me, you've over-

whelmed me. You've overwhelmed me, I say, because I speak from the depths of *my* surrender. But you didn't do it, I imagine, to be cruel, and if you didn't do it to be cruel you did it to take what it would give you." Gradually, as she talked, he faced round again ; she stood there supported by the high back of a chair, either side of which she held tight. "You know what I am, if any man has known, and it's to the thing I am—whatever that is—you've come back at last from so far. It's the thing I am—whatever that is—I now count on you to stand by."

"Whatever that is?"—Dennis mournfully marvelled. "I feel, on the contrary, that I've never, never known!"

"Well, it's before anything a woman who has such a need as no woman has ever had." Then she eagerly added: "Why on earth did you descend on me if you hadn't need of *me*?"

Dennis took for an instant, quite as if she were not there, several turns in the wide place ; moving in the dumb distress of a man confronted with the greatest danger of his life and obliged, while precious minutes lapse, to snatch at a way of safety. His whole air was an instinctive retreat from being

carried by assault, and he had the effect both of keeping far from her and of revolving blindly round her. At last, in his hesitation, he pulled up before her. "What makes, all of a sudden, the tremendous need you speak of? Didn't you remind me but an hour ago of how remarkably low, at our last meeting, it had dropped?"

Rose's eyes, in the dimness, widened with their wonder. "You can speak to me in harshness of what I did an hour ago? You can taunt me with an act of penance that might have moved you—that did move you? Does it mean," she continued, "that you've none the less embraced the alternative that seems to you most worthy of your courage? Did I only stoop, in my deep contrition, to make it easier for you to knock me down? I gave you your chance to refuse me, and what you've come back for then will have been only, most handsomely, to take it. In that case you did injustice there to the question of your revenge. What fault have you to find with anything so splendid?"

Dennis had listened with his eyes averted, and he met her own again as if he had not heard, only bringing out his previous words with a harder

iteration : "What makes your tremendous need ? what makes your tremendous need ?"—he spoke as if that tone were the way of safety. "I don't in the least see why it should have taken such a jump. You must do justice, even after your act of this afternoon—a demonstration far greater than any I dreamed of asking of you—you must do justice to my absolute necessity for seeing everything clear. I didn't there in the garden see anything clear at all—I was only startled and wonder-struck and puzzled. Certainly I was touched, as you say—I was so touched that I particularly suffered. But I couldn't pretend I was satisfied or gratified, or even that I was particularly convinced. You often failed of old, I know, to give me what I really wanted from you, and yet it never prevented the success of your effect on—what shall I call it ?" He stopped short. "On God knows what baser, obscurer part of me ! I'm not such a brute as to say," he quickly went on, "that that effect was not produced this afternoon——"

"You confine yourself to saying," Rose interrupted, "that it's not produced in our actual situation."

He stared through the thicker dusk ; after which, "I don't understand you!" he dropped. "I do say," he declared, "that, whatever your success to-day may be admitted to consist of, I didn't at least then make the admission. I didn't at that moment understand you any more than I do now ; and I don't think I said anything to lead you to suppose I did. I showed you simply that I was bewildered, and I couldn't have shown it more than by the abrupt way I left you. I don't recognise that I'm committed to anything that deprives me of the right of asking you for a little more light."

"Do you recognise by chance," Rose returned, "the horrible blow——?"

"That has fallen on all this wretched place ? I'm unutterably shocked by it. But where does it come into our relations ?"

Rose smiled in exquisite pity, which had the air, however, of being more especially for herself. "You say you were painfully affected ; but you really invite me to go further still. Haven't I put the dots on all the horrid i's and dragged myself through the dust of enough confessions ?"

Dennis slowly and grimly shook his head ; he

doggedly clung to his only refuge. "I don't understand you—I don't understand you."

Rose, at this, surmounted her scruples. "It would be inexpressibly horrible to me to appear to be free to profit by Mr. Bream's misfortune."

Dennis thought a moment. "To appear, you mean, to have an interest in the fact that the death of his daughter leaves him at liberty to invite you to become his wife?"

"You express it to admiration."

He discernibly wondered. "But why should you be in danger of that torment to your delicacy if Mr. Bream has the best of reasons for doing nothing to contribute to it?"

"The best of Mr. Bream's reasons," Rose rejoined, "won't be nearly so good as the worst of mine."

"That of your making a match with some one else? I see," her companion said. "That's the precaution I'm to have the privilege of putting in your power."

She gave the strangest of smiles; the whites of her excited eyes shimmered in the gloom. "Your loyalty makes my position perfect."

Dennis hesitated. "And what does it make my own?"

"Exactly the one you came to take. You *have* taken it by your startling presence; you're up to your eyes in it, and there's nothing that will become you so as to wear it bravely and gallantly. If you don't like it," Rose added, "you should have thought of that before!"

"You like it so much on your side," Dennis retorted, "that you appear to have engaged in measures to create it even before the argument for it had acquired the force that you give such a fine account of."

"Do you mean by giving it out as an accomplished fact? It was never too soon to give it out; the right moment was the moment you were there. Your arrival changed everything; it gave me on the spot my advantage; it precipitated my grasp of it."

Vidal's expression was like a thing battered dead, and his voice was a sound that matched it. "You call your grasp your announcement——?"

She threw back her head. "My announcement *has* reached you? Then you know I've cut off your retreat." Again he turned away from her; he flung

himself on the sofa on which, shortly before, Mrs. Beever had sunk down to sob, and, as if with the need to hold on to something, buried his face in one of the hard, square cushions. She came a little nearer to him ; she went on with her low lucidity : "So you can't abandon me—you can't. You came to me through doubts—you spoke to me through fears. You're mine !"

She left him to turn this over ; she moved off and approached the door at which Mrs. Beever had gone out, standing there in strained attention till, in the silence, Dennis at last raised his head. "What is it you look to me to do ?" he asked.

She came away from the door. "Simply to see me through."

He was on his feet again. "Through what, in the name of horror ?"

"Through everything. If I count on you, it's to support me. If I say things, it's for you to say them."

"Even when they're black lies ?" Dennis brought out.

Her answer was immediate. "What need should I have of you if they were white ones ?" He was

unable to tell her, only meeting her mettle with his stupor, and she continued, with the lightest hint of reproach in her quiet pain: "I thank you for giving that graceful name to my weak boast that you admire me."

He had a sense of comparative idiotcy. "Do you expect me—on that admiration—to marry you?"

"Bless your innocent heart, no!—for what do you take me? I expect you simply to make people believe that you mean to."

"And how long will they believe it if I don't?"

"Oh, if it should come to that," said Rose, "you can easily make them believe that you *have*!" She took a step so rapid that it was almost a spring; she had him now and, with her hands on his shoulders, she held him fast. "So you see, after all, dearest, how little I ask!"

He submitted, with no movement but to close his eyes before the new-born dread of her caress. Yet he took the caress when it came—the dire confession of her hard embrace, the long entreaty of her stony kiss. He might still have been a creature trapped in steel; after she had let him go he still stood at a loss how to turn. There was something,

however, that he presently opened his eyes to try. "That you went over with *me*—that's what you wish me to say?"

"Over to Bounds? Is that what *I* said? I can't think." But she thought all the same. "Thank you for fixing it. If it's that, stick to it!"

"And to our having left the child with Miss Martle?"

This brought her up a moment. "Don't ask me—simply meet the case as it comes. I give you," she added in a marvellous manner, "a perfectly free hand!"

"You're very liberal," said Dennis, "but I think you simplify too much."

"I can hardly do that if to simplify is to leave it to your honour. It's the beauty of my position that *you're* believed."

"That, then, gives me a certain confidence in telling you that Miss Martle was the whole time with me."

Rose stared. "Of what time do you speak?"

"The time after you had gone over to Bounds with Effie."

Rose thought again. "Where was she with you?"

"By the river, on this side."

"On this side? You didn't go to Bounds?"

"Not when I left you for the purpose. I obeyed an impulse that made me do just the opposite. You see," said Dennis, "that there's a flaw in my honour! You had filled my cup too full—I couldn't carry it straight. I kept by the stream—I took a walk."

Rose gave a low, vague sound. "But Miss Martle and I were there together."

"You were together till you separated. On my return to the bridge I met her."

Rose hesitated. "Where was she going?"

"Over to Bounds—but I prevented her."

"You mean she joined you?"

"In the kindest manner—for another turn. I took her the same way again."

Once more Rose thought. "But if she was going over, why in the world should she have let you?"

Dennis considered. "I think she pitied me."

"Because she spoke to you of me?"

"No; because she didn't. But I spoke to her of you," said Dennis.

"And what did you say?"

He hung fire a moment. "That—a short time before—I saw you cross to Bounds."

Rose slowly sat down. "You saw me?"

"On the bridge, distinctly. With the child in your arms."

"Where were you then?"

"Far up the stream—beyond your observation."

She looked at him fixedly, her hands locked together between her knees. "You were watching me?" Portentous and ghostly, in the darker room, had become their confronted estrangement.

Dennis waited as if he had a choice of answers; but at last he simply said: "I saw no more."

His companion as slowly rose again and moved to the window, beyond which the garden had now grown vague. She stood before it a while; then, without coming away, turned her back to it, so that he saw her handsome head, with the face obscure, against the evening sky. "Shall I tell you who did it?" she asked.

Dennis Vidal faltered. "If you feel that you're prepared."

"I've been preparing. I see it's best." Again, however, she was silent.

This lasted so long that Dennis finally spoke.
"Who did it?"

"Tony Bream—to marry Jean."

A loud sound leaped from him, which was thrown back by the sudden opening of the door and a consequent gush of light. Manning marched in with a high lamp, and Doctor Ramage stood on the threshold.

XXX

THE Doctor remained at the door while the maid put down her lamp, and he checked her as she proceeded to the blinds and the other duties of the moment.

"Leave the windows, please ; it's warm. That will do—thanks." He closed the door on her extinguished presence and he held it a little, mutely, with observing eyes, in that of Dennis and Rose.

"Do you want *me*?" the latter promptly asked, in the tone, as he liked, of readiness either to meet him or to withdraw. She seemed to imply that at such an hour there was no knowing what any one might want. Dennis's eyes were on her as well as the Doctor's, and if the lamp now lighted her consciousness of looking horrible she could at least support herself with the sight of the crude embarrassment of others.

The Doctor, resorting to his inveterate practice

when confronted with a question, consulted his watch. "I came in for Mr. Vidal, but I shall be glad of a word with you after I've seen him. I must ask you, therefore"—and he nodded at the third door of the room—"kindly to pass into the library."

Rose, without haste or delay, reached the point he indicated. "You wish me to wait there?"

"If you'll be so good."

"While you talk with *him*?"

"While I talk with 'him.'"

Her eyes held Vidal's a minute. "I'll wait."
And she passed out.

The Doctor immediately attacked him. "I must appeal to you for a fraction of your time. I've seen Mrs. Beever."

Dennis hesitated. "I've done the same."

"It's because she has told me of your talk that I mention it. She sends you a message."

"A message?" Dennis looked as if it were open to him to question indirectness. "Where then is she?"

"With that distracted girl."

"Miss Martle?" Dennis hesitated. "Miss Martle so greatly feels the shock?"

"'Feels' it, my dear sir?" the Doctor cried. "She has been made so pitifully ill by it that there's no saying just what turn her condition may take, and she now calls for so much of my attention as to force me to plead, with you, that excuse for my brevity. Mrs. Beever," he rapidly pursued, "requests you to regard this hurried inquiry as the sequel to what you were so good as to say to her."

Dennis thought a moment ; his face had changed as if by the action of Rose's disappearance and the instinctive revival, in a different relation, of the long, stiff habit of business, the art of treating affairs and meeting men. This was the art of not being surprised, and, with his emotion now controlled, he was discernibly on his guard. "I'm afraid," he replied, "that what I said to Mrs. Beever was a very small matter."

"She doesn't think it at all a small matter to have said you'd help her. You can do so—in the cruel demands our catastrophe makes of her—by considering that I represent her. It's in her name, therefore, that I ask you if you're engaged to be married to Miss Armiger."

Dennis had an irrepressible start; but it might have been quite as much at the freedom of the question as at the difficulty of the answer. "Please say to her that—I *am*." He spoke with a clearness that proved the steel surface he had in a few minutes forged for his despair.

The Doctor took the thing as he gave it, only drawing from his pocket a key, which he held straight up. "Then I feel it to be only right to say to you that this locks"—and he indicated the quarter to which Rose had retired—"the other door."

Dennis, with a diffident hand out, looked at him hard; but the good man showed with effect that he was professionally used to that. "You mean she's a prisoner?"

"On Mr. Vidal's honour."

"But whose prisoner?"

"Mrs. Beever's."

Dennis took the key, which passed into his pocket. "Don't you forget," he then asked with inscrutable gravity, "that we're here, all round, on a level——"

"With the garden?" the Doctor broke in. "I forget nothing. We've a friend on the terrace."

"A friend?"

"Mr. Beever. A friend of Miss Armiger's," he promptly added.

Still showing nothing in his face, Dennis perhaps showed something in the way that, with his eyes bent on the carpet and his hands interclenched behind him, he slowly walked across the room. At the end of it he turned round. "If I have this key, who has the other?"

"The other?"

"The key that confines Mr. Bream."

The Doctor winced, but he stood his ground. "I have it." Then he said as if with a due recognition of the weight of the circumstance: "She has told you?"

Dennis turned it over. "Mrs. Beever?"

"Miss Armiger." There was a faint sharpness in the Doctor's tone.

It had something evidently to do with the tone in which Dennis replied. "She has told me. But if you've left him——"

"I've not left him. I've brought him over."

Dennis showed himself at a loss. "To see *me*?"

The Doctor raised a solemn, reassuring hand;

then, after an instant, "To see his child," he colourlessly said.

"He desires that?" Dennis asked with an accent that emulated this detachment.

"He desires that." Dennis turned away, and in the pause that followed the air seemed charged with a consciousness of all that between them was represented by the unspoken. It lasted indeed long enough to give to an auditor, had there been one, a sense of the dominant unspeakable. It was as if each were waiting to have something from the other first, and it was eventually clear that Dennis, who had not looked at his watch, was prepared to wait longest. The Doctor had moreover to recognise that he himself had sought the interview. He impatiently summed up his sense of their common attitude. "I do full justice to the difficulty created for you by your engagement. That's why it was important to have it from your own lips." His companion said nothing, and he went on: "Mrs. Beever, all the same, feels that it mustn't prevent us from putting you another question, or rather from reminding you that there's one that you led her just now to expect that you'll answer." The Doctor paused again, but

he perceived he must go all the way. "From the bank of the river you saw something that bears upon this"—he hesitated ; then daintily selected his words—"remarkable performance. We appeal to your sense of propriety to tell us what you saw."

Dennis considered. "My sense of propriety is strong ; but so—just now—is my sense of some other things. My word to Mrs. Beever was contingent. There are points *I* want made clear."

"I'm here," said the Doctor, "to do what I can to satisfy you. Only be good as to remember that time is everything." He added, to drive this home, in his neat, brisk way: "Some action has to be taken."

"You mean a declaration made?"

"Under penalty," the Doctor assented, "of consequences sufficiently tremendous. There has been an accident of a gravity——"

Dennis, with averted eyes, took him up. "That can't be explained away?"

The Doctor looked at his watch ; then, still holding it, he quickly looked up at Dennis. "You wish her presented as dying of a natural cause?"

Vidal's haggard face turned red, but he instantly

recovered himself. "Why do you ask, if you've a supreme duty?"

"I haven't *one*—worse luck. I've fifty."

Dennis fixed his eyes on the watch. "Does that mean you can keep the thing quiet?"

The Doctor put his talisman away. "Before I say I must know what you'll do for me."

Dennis stared at the lamp. "Hasn't it gone too far?"

"I know *how* far: not so far, by a peculiar mercy, as it might have gone. There has been an extraordinary coincidence of chances—a miracle of conditions. Everything appears to serve." He hesitated; then with great gravity: "We'll call it a providence and have done with it."

Dennis turned this over. "Do you allude to the absence of witnesses——?"

"At the moment the child was found. Only the blessed three of us. And she had been there——" Stupefaction left him counting.

Dennis jerked out a sick protest. "Don't tell me how long! What do *I* want——?" What he wanted proved, the next moment, to be more knowledge. "How do you meet the servants?"

"Here? By giving a big name to her complaint. None of them have seen her. She was carried in with a success——!" The Doctor threw up triumphant little hands.

"But the people at the other house?"

"They know nothing but that over here she has had an attack which it will be one of the fifty duties of mine I mentioned to you to make sufficiently remarkable. She was out of sorts this morning—this afternoon I was summoned. That call of Tony's at my house is the providence!"

But still Dennis questioned. "Hadn't she some fond nurse—some devoted dragon?"

"The great Gorham? Yes: she didn't want her to come; she was cruelly overborne. Well," the Doctor lucidly pursued, "I must face the great Gorham. I'm already keeping her at bay—doctors, you see, are so luckily despots! They're blessedly bullies. She'll be tough—but it's all tough!"

Dennis, pressing his hand to his head, began wearily to pace again: it was far too tough for *him*. But he suddenly dropped upon the sofa, all but audibly moaning, falling back in the despair that broke through his false pluck. His interlocutor

watched his pain as if he had something to hope from it; then abruptly the young man began: "I don't in the least conceive how——" He stopped short: even this he couldn't bring out.

"How was it done? Small blame to you! It was done in one minute—with the aid of a boat and the temptation (we'll call it!) of solitude. The boat's an old one of Tony's own—padlocked, but with a long chain. To see the place," said the Doctor after an instant, "is to see the deed."

Dennis threw back his head; he covered his distorted face with his two hands. "Why in thunder should I see it?"

The Doctor had moved towards him; at this he seated himself beside him and, going on with quiet clearness, applied a controlling, soothing grasp to his knee. "The child was taken into the boat and it was tilted: that was enough—the trick was played." Dennis remained motionless and dumb, and his companion completed the picture. "She was immersed—she was held under water—she was made sure of. Oh, I grant you it took a hand—and it took a spirit! But they were there. Then

she was left. A pull of the chain brought back the boat ; and the author of the crime walked away."

Dennis slowly shifted his position, dropped his head, dropped his hands, sat staring lividly at the floor. "But how could she be *caught*?"

The Doctor hesitated, as if in the presence of an ambiguity. "The poor little girl? You'd see if you saw the place."

"I passed it to come back here," Dennis said. "But I didn't look, for I didn't know."

The Doctor patted his knee. "If you had known you would have looked still less. She rose ; she drifted some yards ; then she was washed against the base of the bridge, and one of the openings of her little dress hooked itself to an old loose clamp. There she was kept."

"And no one came by ?"

"No one came till, by the mercy of God, *I* came !"

Dennis took it in as if with a long, dry gulp, and the two men sat for a minute looking at each other. At last the younger one got up. "And yet the risk of anything but a straight course is hideous."

The Doctor kept his place. "Everything's hideous.

I appreciate greatly," he added, "the gallantry of your reminding me of my danger. Don't think I don't know exactly what it is. But I have to think of the danger of others. I can measure mine; I can't measure theirs."

"I can return your compliment," Dennis replied. "'Theirs,' as you call it, seems to me such a fine thing for you to care for."

The Doctor, with his plump hands folded on his stomach, gave a small stony smile. "My dear man, I care for my friends!"

Dennis stood before him; he was visibly mystified. "There's a person whom it's very good of you to take this occasion of calling by that name!"

Doctor Ramage stared; with his vision of his interlocutor's mistake all his tight curves grew tense. Then, as he sprang to his feet, he seemed to crack in a grim little laugh. "The person you allude to is, I confess, not, my dear sir——"

"One of the persons," said Dennis, "whom you wish to protect? It certainly would have surprised me to hear it! But you spoke of your 'friends.' Who then is your second one?"

The Doctor looked astonished at the question. "Why, sweet Jean Martle."

Dennis equally wondered. "I should have supposed her the first! Who then is the other?"

The Doctor lifted his shoulders. "Who but poor Tony Bream?"

Dennis thought a moment. "What's *his* danger?"

The Doctor grew more amazed. "The danger we've been talking of!"

"Have we been talking of *that*?"

"You ask me, when you told me you knew——?"

Dennis, hesitating, recalled. "Knew that he's accused——?"

His companion fairly sprang at him. "Accused by *her* too?"

Dennis fell back at his onset. "Is he by anybody else?"

The Doctor, turning crimson, had grabbed his arm; he blazed up at him. "You don't know it all?"

Dennis faltered. "Is there any more?"

"Tony cries on the housetops that *he* did it!"

Dennis, blank and bewildered, sank once more on his sofa. "*He* cries——?"

"To cover Jean."

Dennis took it in. "But if she *is* covered?"

"Then to shield Miss Armiger."

Poor Dennis gazed aghast. "Who meanwhile denounces him?" He was on his feet again; again he moved to the open window and stood there while the Doctor in silence waited. Presently he turned round. "May I see him?"

The Doctor, as if he had expected this, was already at the door. "God bless you!" And he flashed out.

Dennis, left alone, remained rigid in the middle of the room, immersed apparently in a stupor of emotion; then, as if shaken out of it by a return of conscious suffering, he passed in a couple of strides to the door of the library. Here, however, with his hand on the knob, he yielded to another impulse, which kept him irresolute, listening, drawing his breath in pain. Suddenly he turned away—Tony Bream had come in.

XXXI

"If in this miserable hour I've asked you for a moment of your time," Dennis immediately said, "I beg you to believe it's only to let you know that anything in this world I can do for you——" Tony raised a hand that mutely discouraged as well as thanked him, but he completely delivered himself: "I'm ready, whatever it is, to do on the spot."

With his handsome face smitten, his red eyes contracted, his thick hair disordered and his black garments awry, Tony had the handled, hustled look of a man just dragged through some riot or some rescue and only released to take breath. Like Rose, for Dennis, he was deeply disfigured, but with a change more passive and tragic. His bloodshot eyes fixed his interlocutor's. "I'm afraid there's nothing any one can do for me. My disaster's overwhelming; but I must meet it myself."

There was courtesy in his voice; but there was

something hard and dry in the way he stood there, something so opposed to his usual fine overflow that for a minute Dennis could only show by pitying silence the full sense of his wretchedness. He was in the presence of a passionate perversity—an attitude in which the whole man had already petrified. "Will it perhaps help you to think of something," he presently said, "if I tell you that your disaster is almost as much mine as yours, and that what's of aid to one of us may perhaps therefore be of aid to the other?"

"It's very good of you," Tony replied, "to be willing to take upon you the smallest corner of so big a burden. Don't do that—don't do that, Mr. Vidal," he repeated, with a heavy head-shake. "Don't come near such a thing; don't touch it; don't know it!" He straightened himself as if with a long, suppressed shudder; and then with a sharper and more sombre vehemence, "Stand from under it!" he exclaimed. Dennis, in deeper compassion, looked at him with an intensity that might have suggested submission, and Tony followed up what he apparently took for an advantage. "You came here for an hour, for your own reasons, for your

relief : you came in all kindness and trust. You've encountered an unutterable horror, and you've only one thing to do."

"Be so good as to name it," said Dennis.

"Turn your back on it for ever—go your way this minute. I've come to you simply to say that."

"Leave you, in other words——?"

"By the very first train that will take you."

Dennis appeared to turn this over ; then he spoke with a face that showed what he thought of it. "It has been my unfortunate fate in coming to this place—so wrapped, as one might suppose, in comfort and peace—to intrude a second time on obscure, unhappy things, on suffering and danger and death. I should have been glad, God knows, not to renew the adventure, but one's destiny kicks one before it, and I seem myself not the least part of the misery I speak of. You must accept that as my excuse for not taking your advice. I must stay at least till you understand me." On this he waited a moment ; after which, abruptly, impatiently, "For God's sake, Mr. Bream, believe in me and meet me !" he broke out.

"Meet you ?"

"Make use of the hand I hold out to you !"

Tony had remained just within the closed door, as if to guard against its moving from the other side. At this, with a faint flush in his dead vacancy, he came a few steps further. But there was something still locked in his conscious, altered eyes, and coldly absent from the tone in which he said : " You've come, I think, from China ? "

" I've come, Mr. Bream, from China."

" And it's open to you to go back ? "

Dennis frowned. " I can do as I wish."

" And yet you're not off like a shot ? "

" My movements and my inclinations are my own affair. You won't accept my aid ? "

Tony gave his sombre stare. " You ask me, as you call it, to meet you. I beg you to excuse me if on my side I first inquire on what definite ground——? "

Dennis took him straight up. " On the definite ground on which Doctor Ramage is good enough to do so. I'm afraid there's no better ground than my honour."

Tony's stare was long and deep ; then he put out his hand, and while Dennis held it, " I understand you," he said. " Good-bye."

Dennis kept hold of him. "Good-bye?"

Tony had a supreme hesitation. "She's safe."

Dennis had a shorter one. "Do you speak of Miss Martle?"

"Not of Miss Martle."

"Then I can. *She's* safe."

"Thank you," said Tony. He drew away his hand.

"As for the person you do speak of, if *you* say it——" and Dennis paused.

"She's safe," Tony repeated.

"That's all I ask of you. The Doctor will do the rest."

"I know what the Doctor will do." Tony was silent a moment. "What will you do?"

Dennis waited, but at last he spoke. "Everything but marry her."

A flare of admiration rose and fell in Tony's eyes. "You're beyond me!"

"I don't in the least know where I am, save that I'm in a black, bloody nightmare and that it's not I, it's not she, it's not you, it's not any one. I shall wake up at last, I suppose, but meanwhile——"

"There's plenty more to come? Oh, as much as you like!" Tony excitedly declared.

"For me, but not for you. For you the worst's over," his companion boldly observed.

"Over? with all my life made hideous?"

There was a certain sturdiness in Vidal's momentary silence. "You think so now——!" Then he added more gently: "I grant you it's hideous enough."

Tony stood there in the agony of the actual; the tears welled into his hot eyes. "She murdered—she tortured my child. And she did it to incriminate Jean."

He brought it all back to Dennis, who exclaimed with simple solemnity: "The dear little girl—the sweet, kind little girl!" With a sudden impulse that, in the midst of this tenderness, seemed almost savage, he laid on Tony's shoulder a hard, conscientious hand. "She forced her in. She held her down. She left her."

The men turned paler as they looked at each other. "I'm infamous—I'm infamous," said Tony.

There was a long pause that was like a strange assent from Dennis, who at last, however, brought out in a different tone: "It was her passion."

"It was her passion."

"She loves you——!" Dennis went on with a drop, before the red real, of all vain terms.

"She loves me!"—Tony's face reflected the mere monstrous fact. "It has made what it has made—her awful act and my silence. My silence is a part of the crime and the cruelty—I shall live to be a horror to myself. But I see it, none the less, as I see it, and I shall keep the word I gave her in the first madness of my fear. It came to me—there it is."

"I know what came to you," Dennis said.

Tony wondered. "Then you've seen her?"

Dennis hesitated. "I know it from the Doctor."

"I see——" Tony thought a moment. "She, I imagine——"

"Will keep it to herself? Leave that to me!"

Dennis put out his hand again. "Good-bye."

"You take her away?"

"To-night."

Tony kept his hand. "Will her flight help Ramage?"

"Everything falls in. Three hours ago I came for her."

"So it will seem pre-arranged?"

"For the event she announced to you. Our happy union!" said Dennis Vidal.

He reached the door to the hall, where Tony checked him. "There's nothing, then, I shall do for *you*?"

"It's done. We've helped each other."

What was deepest in Tony stirred again. "I mean when your trouble has passed."

"It will never pass. Think of that when you're happy yourself."

Tony's grey face stared. "How shall I ever be——?"

The door, as he spoke, opened from the room to which Mrs. Beever had returned, and Jean Martle appeared to them. Dennis retreated. "Ask *her*!" he said from the threshold.

XXXII

RUSHING to Tony, she wailed under her breath: "I must speak to you—I must speak to you! But how can you ever look at me?—how can you ever forgive me?" In an instant he had met her; in a flash the gulf was bridged: his arms had opened wide to her and she had thrown herself into them. They had only to be face to face to let themselves go; he making no answer but to press her close against him, she pouring out her tears upon him as if the contact quickened the source. He held her and she yielded with a passion no bliss could have given; they stood locked together in their misery with no sound and no motion but her sobs. Breast to breast and cheek to cheek, they felt simply that they had ceased to be apart. This long embrace was the extinction of all limits and questions—swept away in a flood which tossed them over the years and in which nothing remained erect but the

sense and the need of each other. These things had now the beauty of all the tenderness that they had never spoken and that, for some time, even as they clung there, was too strange and too deep for speech. But what was extraordinary was that as Jean disengaged herself there was neither wonder nor fear between them ; nothing but a recognition in which everything swam and, on the girl's part, the still higher tide of the remorse that harried her and that, to see him, had made her break away from the others. "They tell me I'm ill, I'm insane," she went on—"they want to shut me up, to give me things—they tell me to lie down, to try to sleep. But it's all to me, so dreadfully, as if it were *I* who had done it, that when they admitted to me that you were here I felt that if I didn't see you it would make me as crazy as they say. It's to have seen her go—to have seen her go : that's what I can't bear—it's too horrible !" She continued to sob ; she stood there before him swayed to and fro in her grief. She stirred up his own, and that added to her pain ; for a minute, in their separate sorrow, they moved asunder like creatures too stricken to communicate. But they were quickly face to face again, more intimate, with

more understood, though with the air, on either side and in the very freedom of their action, of a clear vision of the effect of their precipitated union—the instinct of not again touching it with unconsecrated hands. Tony had no idle words, no easy consolation; she only made him see more vividly what had happened, and they hung over it together while she accused and reviled herself. “I let her go—I let her go; that’s what’s so terrible, so hideous. I might have got her—have kept her; I might have screamed, I might have rushed for help. But how could I know or dream? How could the worst of my fears——?” She broke off, she shuddered and dropped; she sat and sobbed while he came and went. “I see her little face as she left me—she looked at me as if she knew. She wondered and dreaded: she knew—she knew! It was the last little look I was to have from her, and I didn’t even answer it with a kiss. She sat there where I could seize her, but I never raised a hand. I was close, I was *there*—she must have called for me in her terror! I didn’t listen—I didn’t come—I only gave her up to be murdered! And now I shall be punished for ever: I shall see her in those arms—in those arms!”

Jean flung herself down and hid her face; her smothered wild lament filled the room.

Tony stopped before her, seeing everything she brought up, but only the more helpless in his pity. "It was the only little minute in all the years that you had been forced to fail her. She was always more yours than mine."

Jean could only look out through her storm-beaten window. "It was just because she was yours that she was mine. It was because she was yours from the first hour that I——!" She broke down again; she tried to hold herself; she got up. "What could I do, you see? To you I couldn't be kind." She was as exposed in her young, pure woe as a bride might have been in her joy.

Tony looked as if he were retracing the saddest story on earth. "I don't see how you could have been kinder."

She wondered with her blinded eyes. "That wasn't what thought I was—it *couldn't* be, ever, ever. Didn't I try not to think of you? But the child was a beautiful part of you—the child I could take and keep. I could take her altogether, without thinking or remembering. It was the only thing I

could do for you, and you let me, always, and *she* did. So I thought it would go on, for wasn't it happiness enough? But all the horrible things—I didn't know them till to-day! There they were—so near to us; and there they closed over her, and—oh!" She turned away in a fresh wild spasm, inarticulate and distracted.

They wandered in silence, as if it made them more companions; but at last Tony said: "She was a little radiant, perfect thing. Even if she had not been mine you would have loved her." Then he went on, as if feeling his way through his thickest darkness: "If she had not been mine she wouldn't be lying there as I've seen her. Yet I'm glad she was mine!" he said.

"She lies there because I loved her and because I so insanely showed it. That's why it's I who killed her!" broke passionately from Jean.

He answered nothing till he quietly and gently answered: "It was *I* who killed her."

She roamed to and fro, slowly controlling herself, taking this at first as a mere torment like her own.

"We seem beautifully eager for the guilt!"

"It doesn't matter what any one else seems.

I must tell you all—now. I've taken the act on myself."

She had stopped short, bewildered. "How have you taken it——?"

"To meet whatever may come."

She turned as white as ashes. "You mean you've accused yourself?"

"Any one may accuse me. Whom is it more natural to accuse? What had she to gain? My own motive is flagrant. There it is," said Tony.

Jean withered beneath this new stroke. "You'll say you did it?"

"I'll say I did it."

Her face grew old with terror. "You'll lie? You'll perjure yourself?"

"I'll say I did it for you."

She suddenly turned crimson. "Then what do you think I'll say?"

Tony coldly considered. "Whatever you say will tell against me."

"Against you?"

"If the crime was committed for you."

"'For' me?" she echoed again.

"To enable us to marry."

"Marry?—*we*?" Jean looked at it in blighted horror.

"It won't be of any consequence that we shan't, that we can't: it will only stand out clear that we *can*." His sombre ingenuity halted, but he achieved his demonstration. "So I shall save—whom I wish to save."

Jean gave a fiercer wail. "You wish to save *her*?"

"I don't wish to hand her over. You can't conceive it?"

"I?" The girl looked about her for a negation not too vile. "I wish to hunt her to death! I wish to burn her alive!" All her emotion had changed to stupefaction; the flame in her eyes had dried them. "You mean she's not to suffer?"

"You want her to suffer—all?"

She was ablaze with the light of justice. "How can anything be enough? I could tear her limb from limb. That's what she tried to do to me!"

Tony lucidly concurred. "Yes—what she tried to do to you."

But she had already flashed round. "And yet you condone the atrocity——?"

Tony thought a moment. "Her doom will be to live."

"But how will such a fiend be suffered to live—when she went to it before my eyes?" Jean stared at the mountain of evidence; then eagerly: "And Mr. Vidal—her very lover, who'll swear what he knows—what he saw!"

Tony stubbornly shook his head. "Oh, Mr. Vidal!"

"To make me," Jean cried, "seem the monster——!"

Tony looked at her so strangely that she stopped. "She made it for the moment possible——"

She caught him up. "To suspect me——?"

"I was mad—and you're weren't there." With a muffled moan she sank down again; she covered her face with her hands. "I tell you all—I tell you all," he said. "He knows nothing—he saw nothing—he'll swear nothing. He's taking her away."

Jean started as if he had struck her. "She's here?"

Tony wondered. "You didn't know it?"

"She came back?" the girl panted.

"You thought she had fled?"

Jean hung there like a poised hawk. "Where *is* she?"

Tony gave her, with a grave gesture, a long, absolute look before which, gradually, her passion fell. "She has gone. Let her go."

She was silent a little. "But others: how will they——?"

"There are no others." After a moment he added: "She would have died for me."

The girl's pale wrath gave a flare. "So you want to die for *her*?"

"I shan't die. But I shall remember." Then, as she watched him, "I must tell you all," he said once more. "I knew it—I always knew it. And I made her come."

"You were kind to her—as you're always kind."

"No; I was more than that. And I should have been less." His face showed a rift in the blackness. "I remember."

She followed him in pain and at a distance. "You mean you liked it?"

"I liked it—while I was safe. Then I grew afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Afraid of everything. You don't know—but we're abysses. At least *I'm* one!" he groaned. He seemed to sound this depth. "There are other things. They go back far."

"Don't tell me all," said Jean. She had evidently enough to turn over. "What will become of her?" she asked.

"God knows. She goes forth."

"And Mr. Vidal with her?"

"Mr. Vidal with her."

Jean gazed at the tragic picture. "Because he still loves her?"

"Yes," said Tony Bream.

"Then what will he do?"

"Put the globe between them. Think of her torture," Tony added.

Jean looked as if she tried. "Do you mean *that*?"

He meant another matter. "To have only made us free."

Jean protested with all her woe. "It's her triumph—that our freedom is horrible!"

Tony hesitated; then his eyes distinguished in

the outer dusk Paul Beever, who had appeared at the long window which in the mild air stood open to the terrace. "It's horrible," he gravely replied.

Jean had not seen Paul ; she only heard Tony's answer. It touched again the the source of tears ; she broke again into stifled sobs. So, blindly, slowly, while the two men watched her, she passed from the room by the door at which she had entered.

XXXIII

"You're looking for me?" Tony quickly asked.

Paul, blinking in the lamplight, showed the dismal desert of his face. "I saw you through the open window, and I thought I would let you know——"

"That some one wants me?" Tony was all ready.

"She hasn't asked for you; but I think that if you could do it——"

"I can do anything," said Tony. "But of whom do you speak?"

"Of one of your servants—poor Mrs. Gorham."

"Effie's nurse?—she has come over?"

"She's in the garden," Paul explained. "I've been floundering about—I came upon her."

Tony wondered. "But what's she doing?"

"Crying very hard—without a sound."

"And without coming in?"

"Out of discretion."

Tony thought a moment. "You mean because Jean and the Doctor——?"

"Have taken complete charge. She bows to that, but she sits there on a bench——"

"Weeping and wailing?" Tony asked. "Dear thing, I'll speak to her."

He was about to leave the room in the summary manner permitted by the long widow when Paul checked him with a quiet reminder. "Hadn't you better have your hat?"

Tony looked about him—he had not brought it in. "Why?—if it's a warm night?"

Paul approached him, laying on him as if to stay him a heavy but friendly hand. "You never go out without it—don't be too unusual."

"I see what you mean—I'll get it." And he made for the door to the hall.

But Paul had not done with him. "It's much better you should see her—it's unnatural you shouldn't. But do you mind my just thinking for you the least bit—asking you for instance what it's your idea to say to her?"

Tony had the air of accepting this solicitude; but he met the inquiry with characteristic candour.

"I think I've no idea but to talk with her of Effie."

Paul visibly wondered. "As dangerously ill? That's all she knows."

Tony considered an instant. "Yes, then—as dangerously ill. Whatever she's prepared for."

"But what are *you* prepared for? You're not afraid——?" Paul hesitated.

"Afraid of what?"

"Of suspicions—importunities; her making some noise."

Tony slowly shook his head. "I don't think," he said very gravely, "that I'm afraid of poor Gorham."

Paul looked as if he felt that his warning half failed. "Every one else is. She's tremendously devoted."

"Yes—that's what I mean."

Paul sounded him a moment. "You mean to *you*?"

The irony was so indulgent—and all irony on this young man's part was so rare—that Tony was to be excused for not perceiving it. "She'll do anything. We're the best of friends."

"Then get your hat," said Paul.

"It's much the best thing. Thank you for telling me." Even in a tragic hour there was so much in Tony of the ingenuous that, with his habit of good-nature and his hand on the door, he lingered for the comfort of his friend. "She'll be a resource—a fund of memory. She'll know what I mean—I shall want some one. So we can always talk."

"Oh, *you're* safe!" Paul went on.

It had now all come to Tony. "I see my way with her."

"So do I!" said Paul.

Tony fairly brightened through his gloom. "I'll keep her on!" And he took his course by the front.

Left alone Paul closed the door on him, holding it a minute and lost evidently in reflections of which he was the subject. He exhaled a long sigh that was burdened with many things; then as he moved away his eyes attached themselves as if in sympathy with a vague impulse to the door of the library. He stood a moment irresolute; after which, deeply restless, he went to take up the hat that, on coming in, he had laid on one of the tables. He was in the act of doing this when the door of the library opened

and Rose Armiger stood before him. She had since their last meeting changed her dress and, arrayed for a journey, wore a bonnet and a long, dark mantle. For some time after she appeared no word came from either; but at last she said: "Can you endure for a minute the sight of me?"

"I was hesitating—I thought of going to you," Paul replied. "I knew you were there."

At this she came into the room. "I knew you were here. You passed the window."

"I've passed and repassed—this hour."

"I've known that too, but this time I heard you stop. I've no light there," she went on, "but the window, on this side, is open. I could tell that you had come in."

Paul hesitated. "You ran a danger of not finding me alone."

"I took my chance—of course I knew. I've been in dread, but in spite of it I've seen nobody. I've been up to my room and come down. The coast was clear."

"You've not then seen Mr. Vidal?"

"Oh yes—*him*. But he's nobody." Then as if

conscious of the strange sound of this : "Nobody, I mean, to fear."

Paul was silent a moment. "What in the world is it *you* fear?"

"In the sense of the awful things—you know? Here on the spot nothing. About those things I'm quite quiet. There may be plenty to come; but what I'm afraid of now is my safety. There's something in that——!" She broke down; there was more in it than she could say.

"Are you so sure of your safety?"

"You see how sure. It's in your face," said Rose. "And your face—for what it says—is terrible."

Whatever it said remained there as Paul looked at her. "Is it as terrible as yours?" he asked.

"Oh, mine—mine must be hideous; unutterably hideous forever! Yours is beautiful. Everything, every one here is beautiful."

"I don't understand you," said Paul.

"How should you? It isn't to ask you to do that that I've come to you."

He waited in his woful wonder. "For what have you come?"

"You *can* endure it, then, the sight of me?"

"Haven't I told you that I thought of going to you?"

"Yes—but you didn't go," said Rose. "You came and went like a sentinel, and if it was to watch me——"

Paul interrupted her. "It wasn't to watch you."

"Then what was it for?"

"It was to keep myself quiet," said Paul.

"But you're anything but quiet."

"Yes," he dismally allowed; "I'm anything but quiet."

"There's something then that may help you: it's one of two things for which I've come to you. And there's no one but you to care. You may care a very little; it may give you a grain of comfort. Let your comfort be that I've failed."

Paul, after a long look at her, turned away with a vague, dumb gesture, and it was a part of his sore trouble that, in his wasted strength, he had no outlet for emotion, no channel even for pain. She took in for a moment his clumsy, massive misery. "No—you loathe my presence," she said.

He stood awhile in silence with his back to her, as if within him some violence were struggling up; then with an effort, almost with a gasp, he turned round, his open watch in his hand. "I saw Mr. Vidal," was all he produced.

"And he told you too he would come back for me?"

"He said there was something he had to do, but that he would meanwhile get ready. He would return immediately with a carriage."

"That's why I've waited," Rose replied. "I'm ready enough. But he won't come."

"He'll come," said Paul. "But it's more than time."

She drearily shook her head. "Not after getting off—not back to the horror and the shame. He thought so; no doubt he has tried. But it's beyond him."

"Then what are you waiting for?"

She hesitated. "Nothing—now. Thank you." She looked about her. "How shall I go?"

Paul went to the window; for a moment he listened. "I thought I heard wheels."

She gave ear; but once more she shook her

head. "There are no wheels, but I can go that way."

He turned back again, heavy and uncertain ; he stood wavering and wondering in her path. "What will become of you ?" he asked.

"How do I know and what do I care ?"

"What will become of you ? what will become of you ?" he went on as if he had not heard her.

"You pity me too much," she answered after an instant. "I've failed, but I did what I could. It was all that I saw—it was all that was left me. It took hold of me, it possessed me : it was the last gleam of a chance."

Paul flushed like a sick man under a new wave of weakness. "Of a chance for what ?"

"To make him take her. You'll say my calculation was grotesque—my stupidity as ignoble as my crime. All I can answer is that I might none the less have succeeded. People *have*—in worse conditions. But I don't defend myself—I'm face to face with my mistake. I'm face to face with it forever—and that's how I wish you to see me. Look at me well !"

"I would have done anything for you!" Paul as if all talk with her were vain, wailed under his breath.

She considered this; her dreadful face was lighted by the response it kindled. "Would you do anything now?" He answered nothing; he seemed lost in the vision of what was carrying her through. "I saw it as I saw it," she continued: "there it was and there it is. There it is—there it is," she repeated in a tone sharp, for a flash, with all the excitement she contrived to keep under. "It has nothing to do now with any part or any other possibility even of what may be worst in me. It's a storm that's past, it's a debt that's paid. I may literally be better." At the expression this brought out in him she interrupted herself. "You don't understand a word I utter!"

He was following her—as she showed she could see—only in the light of his own emotion; not in that of any feeling that she herself could present. "Why didn't you speak to me—why didn't you tell me what you were thinking? There was nothing you couldn't have told me, nothing that wouldn't have brought me nearer. If I had known your abasement——"

"What would you have done?" Rose demanded.

"I would have saved you."

"What would you have done?" she pressed.

"Everything."

She was silent while he went to the window.

"Yes, I've lost you—I've lost you," she said at last.

"And you were the thing I might have had. *He* told me that, and I knew it."

"'He' told you?" Paul had faced round.

"He tried to put me off on you. That was what finished me. Of course they'll marry," she abruptly continued.

"Oh yes, they'll marry."

"But not soon, do you suppose?"

"Not soon. But sooner than they think."

Rose looked surprised. "Do you already know what they think?"

"Yes—that it will never be."

"Never?"

"Coming about so horribly. But some day—it will be."

"It will be," said Rose. "And I shall have done it for him. That's more," she said, "than even you would have done for *me*."

Strange tears had found their way between Paul's closed lids. "You're too horrible," he breathed; "you're too horrible."

"Oh, I talk only to you: it's *all* for you. Remember, please, that I shall never speak again. You see," she went on, "that he daren't come."

Paul looked afresh at his watch. "I'll go with you."

Rose hesitated. "How far?"

"I'll go with you," he simply repeated.

She looked at him hard; in her eyes too there were tears. "My safety—my safety!" she murmured as if awestruck.

Paul went round for his hat, which on his entrance he had put down. "I'll go with you," he said once more.

Still, however, she hesitated. "Won't *he* need you?"

"Tony?—for what?"

"For help."

It took Paul a moment to understand. "He wants none."

"You mean he has nothing to fear?"

"From any suspicion? Nothing."

"That's his advantage," said Rose. "People like him too much."

"People like him too much," Paul replied. Then he exclaimed: "Mr. Vidal!"—to which, as she looked, Rose responded with a low, deep moan.

Dennis had appeared at the window; he gave signal in a short, sharp gesture and remained standing in the dusk of the terrace. Paul put down his hat; he turned away to leave his companion free. She approached him while Dennis waited; she lingered desperately, she wavered, as if with a last word to speak. As he only stood rigid, however, she faltered, choking her impulse and giving her word the form of a look. The look held her a moment, held her so long that Dennis spoke sternly from the darkness: "Come!" At this, for a space as great, she fixed her eyes on him; then while the two men stood motionless she decided and reached the window. He put out a hand and seized her, and they passed quickly into the night. Paul, left alone, again sounded a long sigh; this time it was the deep breath of a

man who has seen a great danger averted. It had scarcely died away before Tony Bream returned. He came in from the hall as eagerly as he had gone out, and, finding Paul, gave him his news: "Well—I took her home."

Paul required a minute to carry his thoughts back to Gorham. "Oh, she went quietly?"

"Like a bleating lamb. She's too glad to stay on."

Paul turned this over; but as if his confidence now had solid ground he asked no question. "Ah, you're all right!" he simply said.

Tony reached the door through which Jean had left the room; he paused there in surprise at this incongruous expression. Yet there was something absent in the way he echoed "All right?"

"I mean you have such a pull. You'll meet nothing but sympathy."

Tony looked indifferent and uncertain; but his optimism finally assented. "I daresay I shall get on. People perhaps won't challenge me."

"They like you too much."

Tony, with his hand on the door, appeared struck with this ; but it embittered again the taste of his tragedy. He remembered with all his vividness to what tune he had been "liked," and he wearily bowed his head. "Oh, too much, Paul !" he sighed as he went out.

THE END

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